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WIZARD

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SPIDER-MAN

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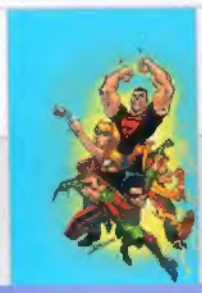
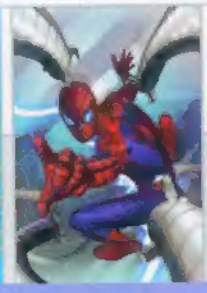
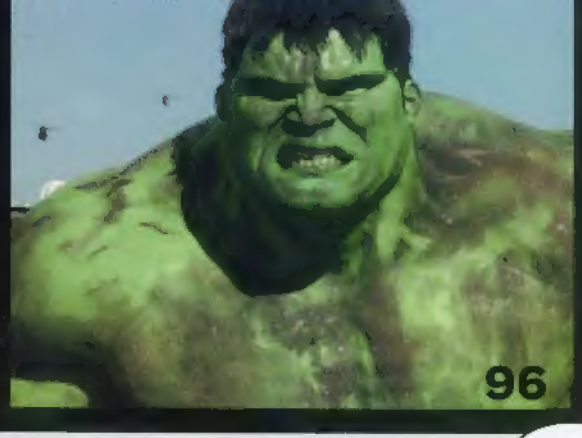
Teen Titans (left) by J. Scott Campbell paves the way for our **Top Five Team Books Spotlight on p. 54.** Spider-Man vs. Doc Ock (center) ties into our **Sam Raimi Q+A on p. 30** and our Q+A with *Doctor Octopus: Negative Exposure* scribe **Brian K. Vaughan on p. 82.** "Smallville" (right) reels you into our **"Smallville" Writers Summit on p. 34.**







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SUPER 'SMALLVILLE' SUMMIT

The Teen of Steel is generating loads of heat for the upcoming Season Three of The WB hit "Smallville"—and he doesn't even need his heat vision to do it!

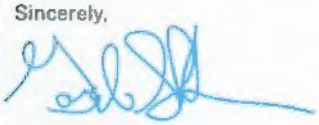
The fine folks from The WB invited us to go behind the scenes of how an episode gets created, so one of our intrepid staffers flew out to sunny L.A. and took a tour of the "Smallville" production offices and sat in with the series' writers during a "break down" (where the writers hash out story details) of one of the episodes.

Executive producers and head writers Al Gough and Miles Millar were on hand to show us the ropes, and series Consulting Producer Jeph Loeb—whose name may ring a bell among fanboys thanks to a little DC title called *Batman* (and *Superman/Batman* for that matter!)—invited us to sit in while the writers plotted out another great installment.

During our visit, the writers gave us the scoop on the fifth episode of Season Three, which features the introduction of an old DCU favorite who's brand new to the Smallville mythos: Perry White, editor of the *Daily Planet*! Can Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen be far behind? I'm keeping my fingers crossed (*and* auditioning for the part of Jimmy)!

Sit back, enjoy our "Smallville" Writers' Summit (p. 34) and the rest of this fantastic issue!

Sincerely,



Gareb Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

45 Number of slices of birthday cake distributed to fans at the DC booth at Wizard World Chicago for Jim Lee's birthday

3 Number of fans who asked Lee to autograph their cake

0 Number of slices Staff Writer Richard Ho got after waiting a half hour

1 Number of leopard-print fedoras worn to the convention

7 Number of people that actually wore said fedora

70 Number of photographs one enthusiastic fan sent us for his costume contest (p. 68) entry

217 Number of beers the interns were ordered to fetch for Wizard staffers during the three days of the convention

102 Number of beers consumed by Senior Managing Editor Joe Yanarella and Staff Writer Mike Cotton at the convention

27 Number of times hotel security was called to the hotel lobby during Wizard's 3 a.m. after party

57 Number of times Dave Marshall proclaimed "Welcome to the Rock!" while writing the Sgt. Rock Preview (p. 74) opener

3 Number of bikinis worn by intern Rickey Purdin during the Wizard Fan Awards

0 Number of bikinis Purdin looked good in

masthead

CREATURES ON THE LOOSE!

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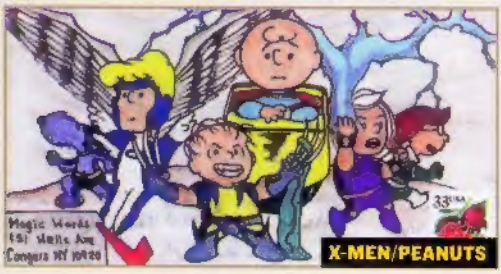

WEN DONG GUAN, Los Angeles, CA

Superman: baby or goo?... You man enough for Punisher? ...& Ultimate vs. Classic Marvel!

The biggest topic in the mailbag this month: *Wizard Zero*. The *Wizard* redesign three issues ago went over big with readers (well, most of 'em...read on), with the exclusive Batman: Hush and Ultimate Spidey stories scoring big points. We'd love to take credit for it all, but the *Wizard* staff was on vacation and/or incarcerated that month, so we didn't have anything to do with it. Big props to the staff of *Cat Fancy* who stepped in and covered for us.

But enough about that, what about Daredevil's sex life? Where's Ray Parker Jr.? And what's better: the Marvel Universe or the Ultimate Universe? All that plus a geography lesson and the reason why Mark Waid wants your head to explode. It's the *Wizard* letters column, hard-hitting journalism at its finest!

Dear Magic Words,

How come in *Superman: Birthright* #1 and *Superman/ Batman* #1, Superman's origin was told as if he were sent to Earth from Krypton as a baby? I thought the post-*Crisis* origin was that it was Kal-El's birthing matrix that was sent to Earth and that technically Kal-El never breathed Krypton's air or was exposed to the Kryptonian environment because Jor-El sent his unborn son to Earth. I thought *Superman/Batman* fit into modern continuity and *Birthright* was going to have aspects of it. How or why did the editors overlook this?

KYLE NELSON
Omaha, NE

As you noted, Kyle, continuity decisions are never a small deal for creators and editors...especially when dealing with the oldest and spit-curliest hero of them all.

"We're interested in what most people know as the continuity," explains Superman Group Editor Eddie Berganza. "It's been almost 20 years since [writer/artist] John Byrne revamped it [in 1986's *Man of Steel* mini-series], yet 'Smallville' is out there every week, and a baby comes out of that rocket. A birthing matrix would have been much harder to explain to new readers. *Superman/Batman* would have been less interesting if we had to start it that way."

On the other hand, *Birthright* writer Mark Waid expressed slightly more devious intentions behind the change to Supes' origin. "We did it because we wanted to make your head explode," admits Waid. "Did it work?"

Dear Magic Words,

Is there really going to be a new Ghostbusters comic? You might be getting more e-mails from the other ghost-heads out there because we are eagerly awaiting info. *Any* info on the Ghostbusters you find, *we need it.*

TYERON HAMMONTREE
Tyeron_Hammontree@dell.com

Indeed Tyeron, a new Ghostbusters comic will be hitting the streets sometime in 2004. Published by 88 MPH Studios, *Ghostbusters* is a four-issue mini-series written by Andrew Dabb (*Happydale*) with an artist still to be determined. Set in the continuity of the first movie, the series takes place six months after Gozer's New York

QUICKHITS

"*Wizard Zero* was quite possibly one of the best issues ever. You've brought back the *Wizard* of old that I knew and loved."

GREG HOWARD
ERIE, CO

I applaud *Wizard Zero*. I was about to quit purchasing your magazine, but after reading this issue, I realized that you made *Wizard* into the magazine it always needed to be.

BARRY HOLLIFIELD, KERNERSVILLE, NC

What did I think of *Wizard Zero*? Well...I didn't think it was much different than any other issue of *Wizard*.

JDFISCHERX@AOL.COM

I love the recent articles on creators like Neal Adams [in *Zero*] and Jim Shooter [in *Wizard* #143]. It's great to put personality with these talents. The history lesson alone is worth my money.

CRAIG PARRILLO, MARLTON, NJ

There's only one glaring omission from your "Essential DC" piece, the fantastic Legion of Super-Heroes epic, "The Great Darkness Saga" [from *Legion* (v. 1) #290-#294]!

TOM DEMPSEY, OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA

Thank you, thank you, thank you for finally spotlighting *Catwoman* and the great Ed Brubaker [in *Wizard Zero*]. His "Charlatan" story [in *Detective Comics* #777-#782] is as good as Jeph Loeb's "Hush."

JUSTIN BOATWRIGHT, KUNA, ID

It looks like you guys hired a team of lawyers to rewrite your new price guide so that it looks bigger without actually saying anything.

SCOTT R. SANDERS, JUNCTION CITY, KS

I thought 50 Cent couldn't suck anymore, then I read the "In Da Cave" parody in *Wizard Zero*—let that intern go!

THEO POTTER, CINCINNATI, OH

I disagree with one "Best Artists in Comics" pick. No offense to Adam Hughes, but Jim Lee draws the hottest chicks.

JASON MUTSCHEL
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, CANADA

Wizard Zero was interesting enough—even with more pages—that I wanted to read everything in the issue.

RICARDO SEPULVEDA
RICANPIMPS@HOTMAIL.COM

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an email to: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

appearance in the first film. And get this—the mini-series will be followed by an ongoing Ghostbusters title! No word yet on a dancing Statue of Liberty one-shot.

Dear Wizard,
I just recently saw the Daredevil movie and the hype it has received was definitely worthwhile. Like "Spider-Man," the film did an excellent job at showing the extraordinary yet retaining its reality. However, Daredevil's relationship with Elektra got me thinking. Since Matt Murdock has heightened senses, wouldn't the touch of the opposite sex make him...you know? That love scene was pretty passionate.

AVERY MOORE
Greenwood, SC

Since most of the *Wizard* staff knows exactly zilch about being "intimate" with things that aren't inflatable, we consulted the expertise of someone a little more...experienced in such matters. Namely, *Daredevil* super-scribe Brian Michael Bendis. "What kind of person would spend all their time wondering what kind of sex superheroes have?" asks Bendis. "It's just not right. Well, except...I can't help but wonder what kind of kinkiness Reed Richards and Sue Storm get into. I mean she can make force fields in any shape and he can 'stretch'..."

Everything else he said we can't print. Go read the *Powers* letters page for cool swear words.

Dear Wizard,
I am a huge fan of the *Shi* series. I had been looking forward to the movie, but it seems like I've been waiting forever. Are there any new stories coming out? The Art Gallery Editions were cool, but I want a story. What is happening with her?

YANNIE DOUGHERTY
Attleboro, MA

..."Yannie?" Really? Your name is "Yannie?" A Magic Words first.

Anyway, Shi strikes back in big way in 2004. To celebrate her 10th anniversary, Dark Horse will publish a four-issue mini-series by Shi creator Billy Tucci. While the movie may be a little further off, Tucci assures fans that he hasn't given up on it. "I've finished the first draft of the screenplay," says Tucci. "It's optioned by Mimi Gitlin, who used to run Ridley Scott's production company. Rumor has it that both Kelly Hu and Lucy Liu are interested in the film."

Kelly Hu and Lucy Liu? All they need is Elisabeth Shue for the trifecta, and they're in business. This is fun. They could all drink Mountain Dew. With Eliza Dushku. In a church pew. All right, show's over. Next letter.

DIDJA KNOW?

90 percent of letters this month discussed *Wizard Zero*.

Dear Wizard,
All my life, I have been the oddball chick who reads comics. While I have reaped many unforeseen benefits from this, one stands out because it is so odd. I have always had a ready topic of conversation with a hot guy, because all genuinely hot guys dig *Punisher*. Strange, I know, but true. It is not reciprocal; all guys who read *Punisher* are not hot, without exception. So, if you think

you're all that, but *Punisher* bores you, you're just a wannabe. Obviously, men are blissfully ignorant of this phenomenon, or *Punisher*'s circulation would be huge.

PAULA RICE
Holyoke, MA

As everyone knows, the *Wizard* staff is full of hot guys and we'd love to discuss *Punisher*, so drop us a line. Oh wait, you just did. Uh, here...talk to *Punisher* writer Garth Ennis: "And here I thought it was only the mentally deranged who liked *Punisher*."

DIDJA KNOW?

Approximately two hours a day is spent reading fan letters.

Wizard,
I'd like to start by saying that I really appreciate the new *Wizard* design. It looks much more polished and professional than before. I figured that was part of the scheme when I saw the teasers for *Wizard Zero*. I had also hoped that *Wizard* would be expanding its coverage to cover more of the comics industry rather than just Marvel, DC, Top Cow and the handful of other big dogs.

Needless to say I was very disappointed. There are so many very well-written and drawn comics out there that get little to no coverage. Even the Vertigo line is lucky to get a paragraph in the back of the book. It seems like *Wizard* wants to be as safe as possible and not take many risks on what is the cutting edge of the industry. It's really safe to put superheroes on the cover every single month but you are not attracting readers that aren't hardcore fanboys. It'd be really nice to see *Liberty Meadows* or *Kissing Chaos* on the cover.

I hope that this doesn't seem too much like whining but the fact is that hero books are not the future and while we all love them they need to stop hogging the spotlight. This is the only way the industry will gain any kind of serious attention. I believe that Marvel and DC are making great strides in the right direction with books like *Trouble* and *Bad Girls* but the fact is that *Wizard* can make or break a book no matter how good, or bad, it may be.

Maybe you guys should change your name from *The Comics Magazine* to *The Superhero Comics Magazine*.

Sincerely a True Believer,
BRYAN STONE
marsmckay@hotmail.com

On the plus side, a year's subscription is only $29.95.

But to tackle your points: *Wizard*'s goal—the goal of every printed periodical—is to entice a consumer to buy product. The loudest way to shout that: a hot cover. *Maxim* features sexy babes, *People* focuses on trendy celebs and *Wizard* has mainstream superheroes. While *Liberty Meadows* could make for a great cover image, will the average fan or casual consumer know what that is? Probably not. What we do is expose readers to some of comics' lesser known gems inside the magazine *after* we hook 'em with our snazzy Wolverine cover. See? It's all very Machiavellian and stuff.

Now as for *Wizard* content, our core audience is the Spider-Man, Batman and guy-with-X-in-name fan. Do we cover lesser known properties? Absolutely. To say we don't is unfair and flat-out untrue. We cover non-mainstream properties throughout the book, most prominently in the "Secret Stash" section we created specifically for books of this nature.

And as for the comic industry gaining serious attention, let's all thank "Smallville," the "Teen Titans" cartoon and the six billion Marvel superhero movies for spreading the good word.

You might also want to check out *Wizard Edge*, our annual magazine devoted to the indy comics scene. Look for it in January.

Hey Wizards,
What's up with Wonder Woman? I've never been much of a fan, but in *Wizard Zero*, Greg Rucka writes that "she is bound by Greek myth..." etc., etc. That being the case...how the hell is she also an "Amazon princess?" Amazon=South America, Greece=well, Greece. Explain.

SCOTT HARDING
St. Johns, MI

Must...fight..."all...Greek...to...me" joke!

Whew! Close one. Here's a quick Greek-lit lesson for you: Even though the Amazon River is indeed in South America, the Amazons don't hang their breast plates there. Ancient Greek poet Homer ("The Simpsons"/*The Iliad*) was one of the first to write about the Amazons of Themiscyra, who resided in the Southern Black Sea region near the Mediterranean. Living with only women, the Amazon Warrior Women invaded Lycia, Phrygia, Attica and even Greece during the Trojan War. Things have calmed down there these days though, with most of the morning spent giving sponge baths to one another, afternoons of talking about boys and late-night pillow fights.

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MAIL FROM CREATORS

Folks,

I hate to contradict an old friend, but I'm afraid that Jim Shooter's memory proved somewhat faulty in a recent interview with your magazine [*Wizard* #143]. I'm referring to his claim that he totally revised the ending of the Iron Man alcohol storyline back in the 1980s. This is simply not the case. Knowing that my own memory may not be perfect, I checked it against the only other person who was directly involved in creating that story, my co-plotter, Bob Layton. And Bob's memory matches my own: the ending to that storyline was ours, not Jim's. Further, I have the original carbon copies (yes, this was from the dark ages before home computers) of the plots for those final issues.

Whenever I alter a plot at an editor's request, I add "revised" or "2nd Draft" to the heading. Those carbons have no such designation, indicating that they were the initial plots that I submitted to editor Jim Salicrup. And the events called for are precisely the same as those which were published in *Iron Man* #128-#131. Jim Shooter has many, many accomplishments to be proud of from his days as editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics. But coming up with the ending to the Iron Man alcoholism saga is not one of them.

I appreciate the opportunity to correct this misinformation for your readers.

DAVID MICHELINIE
Hockessin, DE

Jim Shooter was unavailable for comment at press time.

Guys,

First off, you guys never reply to my e-mails. And that makes me pissed . I have sent plenty of e-mails and none of them have been replied to. What's up with that? 'Cause I keep seeing some really crappy letters in *Wizard* that should not see the light of day before mine. So please answer this e-mail, will ya? My question is, now that the *New X-Men* storyline has revealed some secrets regarding the Weapon Plus Program, does anyone know which character holds what spot on the numbers chart as far as being which number in the program? We have learned that Wolverine is Weapon X, Fantomex is Weapon XIII, and the new baddie they are currently fighting is Weapon XV. So who is Weapon I-IX and also, Weapon XI, XII and XIV. I think Deadpool, Maverick and Sabretooth were possible members. I'm not sure. Do you know?

COREY BRITTO
Danbury, CT

Weapon XII is the Wizard Bunny. He's the best there is at what he does, and what he does is not wear pants. Monster.

For the rest of the lineage of the Weapon Plus program, we checked out September's *New X-Men* #145, and if you take a close look you'll find some answers including references to Captain America (Weapon I) and former Daredevil villain Nuke.

"There are some subtle clues," says X-Men Line Editor Mike Marts. "We'll be following up a lot of these in the *Weapon X* ongoing early next year."

Dear *Wizard*,

My friends and I have been arguing, since I like the Ultimate Marvel Universe more than the original Marvel Universe. Here's why:

The original Marvel Universe is messed up. The original Marvel Universe has too many things going on at the same time in the same place. Didn't anyone notice the Sentinels heading for Genosha in *New X-Men* #115? Just because the X-Men didn't notice doesn't mean every other superpowered being wouldn't notice. And the comics just don't interact much anymore. There are no more crossovers. The Ultimate Universe came up with the best crossover I have ever read—*The Ultimate War*. Wouldn't it make sense that Captain America would go after Magneto because he was a threat to the United States? And he did in the Ultimate Universe. *New X-Men* is the best comic in the original universe, thanks to writer Grant Morrison, but one book is not enough. I don't like the fact that the writers of the X-Men titles like Wolverine, so they all put him in their books. They should just make up their mind. I hate the fact that Wolverine's defending Xavier's School in *New X-Men*, while he's on the other side of the world fighting werewolves in *Uncanny X-Men*.

DIDJA KNOW?

At least one fan per month challenges the *Wizard* staff to a drinking contest.

So, the Ultimate Universe learns from the mistakes made in the past. It filters out all that was bad about the original universe, and places all the good aspects into the Ultimate Universe.

IAN MENDOZA
Somewhere in the U.S.

As you point out, the great thing about the Ultimate Marvel Universe right now is that it's streamlined. Since only two writers—Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar—work consistently in the line, there are fewer continuity glitches or character inconsistencies. But give them time. In 10 years, Bendis and Millar might be long gone, and there could be an Ultimate Line of books as big and convoluted as the original Marvel Universe. In fact, it might be time to start planning a third Marvel universe. How's "Double Secret Probation Marvel Universe" sound? Like poop? Ah well. Let's get them *Cat Fancy* editors back in here to make *Wizard* more better.

...and that's it, no more room left to write stuff. Jump back in 30 for more love.

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WILDSTORM WARNING!

Jim Lee leads massive crossover that shakes up DC imprint

MIDNIGHTER SNACK The Authority would let nothing stand in their way when Pizza Rolls were on the line.

Just like Tears for Fears sang in the '80s, "everybody wants to rule the world"—even Jim Lee.

Actually, the WildStorm founder and red-hot *Batman* artist, who's dominated sales charts for over a year now, doesn't have any plans for true world domination, but the characters from *The Authority* do.

Beginning in February 2004, WildStorm's "Eye of the Storm" titles—*Sleeper*, *The Authority*, *Stormwatch* and *Wildcats*—will all take a one-month hiatus to be replaced by a new four-issue mini-series, tentatively titled *Eye of the Storm: Coup D'etat*. According to Lee, who pencils the first issue of the series, the new event marks major changes in the WildStorm Universe.

"The Authority basically takes over the world. They decide that the world governments are still screwing things up and they're going to make a difference and make the best world," revealed Lee. "They stage a *coup d'etat* and their power grab has all these other ramifications for *Stormwatch*, *Wildcats* and the *Sleeper* series."

Each issue will be written by the regular team of "Eye of the Storm" writers, including Ed Brubaker (*Sleeper*) who teams with Lee on the first issue; Micah Ian Wright (*Stormwatch*) pairs with upcoming *Vigilante* artist Carlos D'Anda (p. 19) on part two; Joe Casey (*Wildcats*) writes the third issue featuring art by Alé Garza (*Titans/Young Justice: Graduation Day*); and Image founder Whilce Portacio pencils the final chapter, written by *Authority* scribe Robbie Morrison.

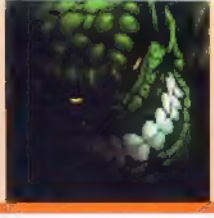
DIDJA KNOW?

Jim Lee's first comic work was *Santa Samurai* for Solson in 1987.

"I really want to showcase the ['Eye of the Storm' writers] because I think they're some of the most underrated and underappreciated writers out there today," gushed Lee.

Lee said while events such as this one have become commonplace in

Supercat takes super-crap Streaky "too much cat" for Fresh Step cat litter... page 178



Abomination to miss UPN fall season Monstrous gamma gargoyle "not really into D.H. Hughley"... page 189

comics, *Coup D'etat* will have major ramifications that will affect the WildStorm Universe for years to come and be a perfect place for new readers to jump onto the "Eye of the Storm" line.

"The Authority is really the catalyst for this story," explained Lee. "When they decide they're going to run the world, that creates all sorts of questions. Are six superpowered beings enough to control seven billion people? Well, the answer is no. They create as much a mess as they do good. They are forces for good and forces for change, but they are not bureaucrats, they are not administrators or government officials. There will of course be allusions to real life and real world events."

Lee also revealed that after *Coup D'etat*, fans can expect the regular books to pick up where the mini-series left off, as well as a new addition—a new *Wetworks* series debuting in March by writer Mike Carey (*Hellblazer*) and series creator/artist Portacio.

"The original *Wetworks* series was built around a very exciting and unusual conflict—high-tech super-soldiers versus supernatural monsters," said Carey. "What I want to do is to take those same slightly-at-odds concepts and put them together in a completely unexpected way. You can't do that by going back to the original team and the original dynamic. You have to find a new way of meshing superheroes, post-cyberpunk high tech and gothic horror."

While all of the "Eye of the Storm" titles have worked hard to keep separate identities and not focus on crossover events or gimmick stunts, Lee said that *Coup D'etat* was needed to bring a more cohesive feel to the line as well as prove to fans that while other comic lines may be scared to kill characters or change the tone of books, the WildStorm Universe is the one place where literally anything can change at any given moment.

"What we liked about this story was that it immediately brought the heroes into sort of diametrical opposition," explained Lee. "What the Authority thinks is good is Stormwatch's worst nightmare—they're going to lose funding and now they're driven underground.

"Meanwhile, the Wildcats team will kind of be divided into what they want to do," continued Lee. " It really was a way to show what the 'Eye of the Storm' is about—this is a universe where anything can happen." ■ **MIKE COTTON & RICHARD HO**

Storm Chasers

This honkin' "Coup d'etat" crossover ain't the only thing happening from DC's WildStorm imprint. If you're looking for a regular dose of goodness from Jim Lee's publishing house, check out these ongoing titles and mini-series.

PLANETARY

Warren Ellis writes the living heck out of this sci-fi/adventure series, which stars Elijiah Snow, the Drummor and Jakita Wagner as three super-archeologists uncovering a hidden history of superheroes, alien invasions and other assorted elements of comic weirdness. A great send-up of comics and pop culture, this book's also helped by the amazing art of John Cassaday. (For more on *Planetary*, see p. 58)

RED

This three-issue mini-series has a pretty simple premise—aging black ops worker strikes back with awesome fury when the government agency that created him tries to whack him—but when handled by the aforementioned Ellis, the details of this book hit readers like an ice pick to the forehead. We're *still* pranking each other in the office with a sinister one-word message: "Red."

SLEEPER

Wake up and smell the goodness, people! Tons of creators claim this book is among their favorites; now it's time to get the fanboys on board. Love superheroes with a black ops spin? The intrigue of international espionage coupled with the nail-biting suspense of a noir classic? *Sleeper*'s got all of these in spades, courtesy of Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips. Let's hope WildStorm opts for a second 12-issue maxi-series for a Season 2.

THE POSSESSED

This six-issue shocker by Geoff Johns and Kris Grimminger features dark and disturbing artwork by Liam Sharp, which brings to lush life the creepy script about a group of mercenaries—once possessed by demons—who try to save others being haunted by the supernatural. When not biting each other's heads off, they're dispatching demons with rocket launchers. How cool is that?

TERRA OBSCURA

Alternate universe alert! This six-issue mini-series by Alan Moore and Peter Hogan immerses readers in a brand new alternate Earth with its own history of costumed heroes, menacing supervillains...and world-shaking conspiracies! A group of retired "science heroes" investigates a mysterious phenomenon near the Grand Canyon, while an organization called Terror Inc. looks to abolish law enforcement and superheroes of any kind.

SMAX

If you loved Alan Moore's high-concept cop series *Top 10*, you'll wanna add this five-issue mini-series into your comics lineup! Officers Jeff Smax and Robyn Slinger (a..k.a. Toybox) travel to Smax's home dimension to attend his uncle's funeral, and get caught up in an adventure involving all sorts of fantastical creatures, such as elves, witches, gnomes and unicorns—which apparently make for good eating! ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

MEET JIM LEE AT WIZARD WORLD TEXAS, NOV. 21-23! SEE WIZARDUNIVERSE.COM FOR DETAILS!

THE BUZZ BIN

SECRET WARS Brian Michael Bendis' top secret project has been revealed—the *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer will team with Italian painter Gabriele Dell'Otto on an upcoming six-issue *Secret Wars* mini-series! Although the mini-series is still unscheduled, to give Dell'Otto time to paint the first few issues before solicitation, word is the series could be shipping in late 2004.

HOWARD CHAYKIN *Vigilante* and *The Question* won't be the only Silver Age revamps coming out of DC in 2004 (p. 19). *Challengers of the Unknown* will be returning as well, in the form of a six-issue mini-series written and drawn by Chaykin.

ASPEN The legal battle between Michael Turner's Aspen Comics and Top Cow Productions is finally settled. According to insiders familiar with the dispute, Turner's *Ekos*, *Soulfire* and *Fathom* projects are now all cleared to ship as soon as Turner can work out details with Diamond Distributors.

FIRESTORM DC's long-awaited *Firestorm* project will finally hit stands in the spring of 2004, with writer Dan Jolley (*G.I. Joe: Frontline*) at the helm. Fans can look forward to the introduction of a brand new character taking on the mantle of Firestorm. The artist hasn't been confirmed yet, but DC is rumored to be looking at ChrisCross (*Captain Marvel*).

NEW X-MEN With Grant Morrison off of *New X-Men* with March's issue #153, Marvel's reportedly talking to top-name talent from within and outside the comic industry. While no names can be revealed yet, the two top candidates would have fanboys drooling, according to insiders.

CAPTAIN AMERICA Look for big changes in *Captain America* beginning in December. With the new creative team of Robert Morales (*Truth*) and Chris Bachalo (*New X-Men*) on board, don't be surprised if you see Cap taking on an active role in U.S. politics.

IMAGE In addition to the recently released *Whiskey Dickel International Cowgirl*, Mark Ricketts (*Nowheresville*) has several more graphic novels on the horizon, including an Image book called *Dioramas: A Love Story* (slated for March 2004) and a Dark Horse book called *Lazarus Jack* (April 2004).

■ THE WIZARD STAFF

THE X-MEN GET THEIR MACK ON

Writer David Mack tackles 'Ultimate X-Men'

When *Ultimate X-Men* writer Brian Michael Bendis decided to send Wolverine to Japan, he knew no one could shanghai him like *Kabuki* creator David Mack.

Mack collaborates with Bendis, then follows the scribe on a run of his own beginning in summer 2004 with current artist David Finch continuing penciling duties.

"We are co-writing #46-#50, then [Mack] is solo," explained Bendis, who is eager to work with his longtime friend. "We have a great arc set up together."

The two scribes are no strangers to collaboration, having worked closely together on *Daredevil*, and Mack is excited to be tackling another project with Bendis.

"A lot of the fun of it is co-coordinating things with Brian and hatching stories out because we've been friends for years and years—we even had some real life experiences we want to put in the story," revealed Mack. "Whenever we have an opportunity to work together it's a lot of fun."

The story continues the Wolverine storyline that Millar and Bendis set up and takes the wanton Canuck to Japan for the first time. While all of the X-Men will be involved, Wolverine and his sordid past will be the focal point.

"The character that relates to me the most is Wolverine," explained Mack. "I think I have a good take on him because there's a Wolverine story that I'd been working on that ties in with the Echo character [from Mack's *Daredevil* runs]. He's interesting because there's always that struggle between his humanity and his kind of bestial urge."

So does this sojourn to Japan mean readers will get their first look at Ultimate Mariko?

Mack's lips are sealed, but "surprises and twists and turns are the name of the game," he teased. ■ TODD CASEY

SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED

Jimenez, Campbell join growing list of DC exclusives

Check off two more names for DC. The publisher recently snagged writer/artists Phil Jimenez (*New X-Men*) and J. Scott Campbell (*Danger Girl*) to exclusive deals as it continued to make waves among the creative community. In August, the company announced exclusive deals for writers Grant Morrison (*New X-Men*), Greg Rucka (*Wonder Woman*), Jeph Loeb (*Superman/Batman*) and artist Tim Sale (*Spider-Man: Blue*).

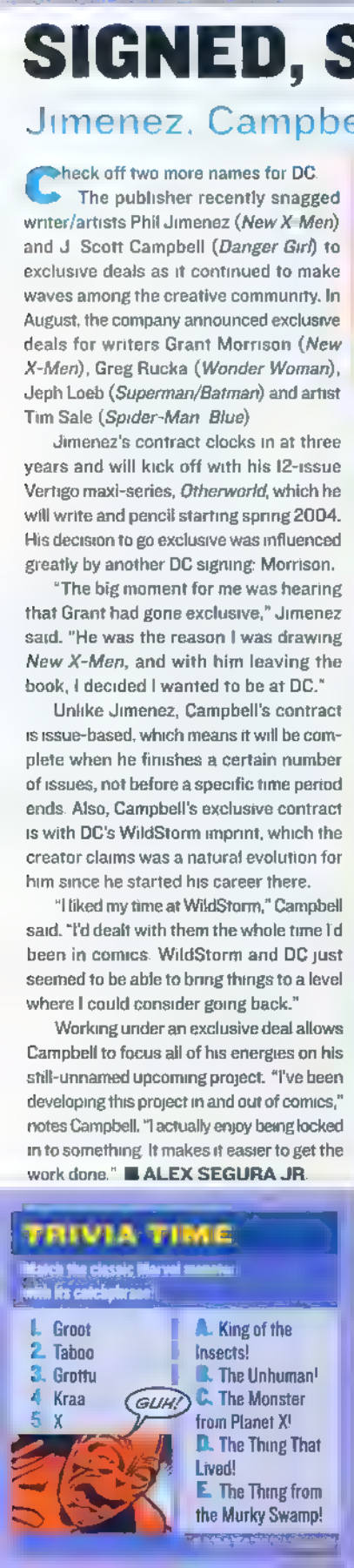
Jimenez's contract clocks in at three years and will kick off with his 12-issue Vertigo maxi-series, *Otherworld*, which he will write and pencil starting spring 2004. His decision to go exclusive was influenced greatly by another DC signing: Morrison.

"The big moment for me was hearing that Grant had gone exclusive," Jimenez said. "He was the reason I was drawing *New X-Men*, and with him leaving the book, I decided I wanted to be at DC."

Unlike Jimenez, Campbell's contract is issue-based, which means it will be complete when he finishes a certain number of issues, not before a specific time period ends. Also, Campbell's exclusive contract is with DC's WildStorm imprint, which the creator claims was a natural evolution for him since he started his career there.

"I liked my time at WildStorm," Campbell said. "I'd dealt with them the whole time I'd been in comics. WildStorm and DC just seemed to be able to bring things to a level where I could consider going back."

Working under an exclusive deal allows Campbell to focus all of his energies on his still-unnamed upcoming project. "I've been developing this project in and out of comics," notes Campbell. "I actually enjoy being locked in to something. It makes it easier to get the work done." ■ **ALEX SEGURA JR.**



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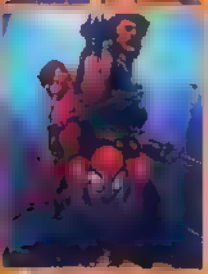
HEAT INDEX

DC Comics to Read & Save This Month

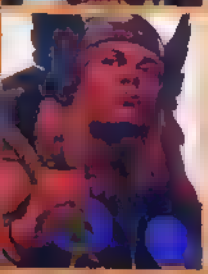
GREEN ARROW #29 (DC) Judd Winick's on target with his first Green Arrow arc, especially the introduction of a kickass new villain called Drakon, an assassin who's deadly with every weapon imaginable. After Drakon crucified Ollie in issue #28, the Emerald Archer comes back with a serious mad-on! And to top it off, Ollie's macking on a new shorty behind Black Canary's back!

FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE JUSTICE LEAGUE #2 (DC) Easily the funniest book of the year! From Elongated Man bitching that his wife and Fire think he's only a "four" (outta 10), to Mary Marvel avoiding Captain Atom because she "might want to have children some day," this book will keep your sides splitting long after you put it down.



ULTIMATE DAREDEVIL (Marvel) If you thought Brian Michael Bendis' Daredevil couldn't get cooler, take a look at Ultimate Daredevil from *Ultimate X-Men* #36. With artist David Finch's perfectly rendered pencils, Ultimate Daredevil may be the next character—like Ultimate Wolverine—to challenge his Marvel U. counterparts in terms of popularity.

H-E-R-O #7 (DC) Writer Will Pfeifer tackles the question: What if Johnny Knoxville and the "Jackass" crew had superpowers? A group of wannabe extreme athletes gets the H-E-R-O device and begins performing super-over-the-top stunts, like "Acid Bath" and "Third Rail Taste Test," in a hysterical story that should put this series on every fanboy's pull list!



THOR: VIKINGS #1 (MAX/Marvel) Vikings weren't the nicest guys, considering they raped and plundered wherever they went. Garth Ennis presents this mature readers' mini that finds Thor battling a horde of undead Vikings who show up in NYC looking to take a bite out of the Big Apple...and its inhabitants! Ennis mayhem (severed heads, rivers of blood) ensues.

SUPREME POWER #1 (MAX/Marvel) J. Michael Straczynski has turned superhero conventions on their ear (*Rising Stars, Amazing Spider-Man*), so you know you're in for a roller coaster ride when he tackles the Squadron Supreme. In this ish, readers track the growth of super-tot Hyperion, who gives new meaning to the phrase "hot dog" in this mature readers epic.

DARK HORSE ON THE HUNT

Publisher searching for new talent

Dark Horse is looking for a few good creators. And you might be one of them

The publisher has been running Uncle Sam-esque house ads featuring the mug of President Mike Richardson announcing "Mike wants you! For the Dark Horse Army!" in an effort geared at reinvigorating the publisher's talent pool.

"When I first started Dark Horse, I was looking for unique work," Richardson said "Despite the fact we've published more creator-owned work than any other publisher in history, there's a perception that we just do a lot of licensed books."

SAM I AM Dark Horse Pres. Mike Richardson wants your submission!

With the industry on an upswing creatively, Richardson felt the time was right to launch the talent search

"The response has been overwhelming," Richardson said. "We've found a couple of projects. I'm trying to find the next Mike Mignola, Frank Miller or Paul Chadwick."

Richardson, who is reviewing each application, hopes fans will get to see the fruits of the search in print sometime next year. "I've gone through hundreds so far," Richardson said "We've got about 12-15 projects I'm going to take a close look at. Of the ones I pull out, a few will be published."

Applicants are instructed to visit **www.darkhorse.com** for the official entry form and complete rules. Applicants should bring their best project and an entry form to the Dark Horse booth at Wizard World Texas, Nov. 22-24

"What surprises me is the quality of the submissions," Richardson noted "There are so many right on the edge, and it means the ones we do choose will be special." ■ **AS JR.**

THEY SAID IT

"Show me the town that could rally against monsters with names like Blip, Sporr, Taboo and Glop! How about Fin Fang Foom and Kraa?"

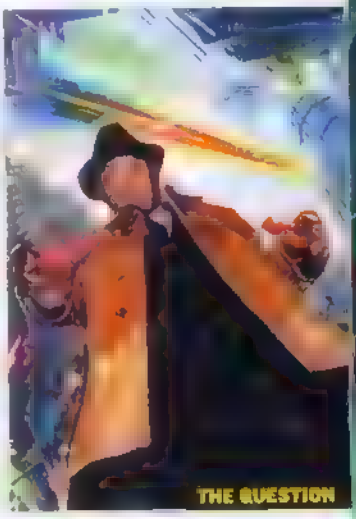
JACK KIRBY IN 'MARVEL MONSTER MASTERWORKS'

SUPER-STORM TARGETS DCU

WildStorm unleashes creators on Metropolis

Citizens of Metropolis better ready their umbrellas, because a WildStorm's about to blow into town

Kicking off in summer 2004, the "Superstorm" event finds DC crossing over creators on its imprints in an effort to give both entities a transfusion of new blood



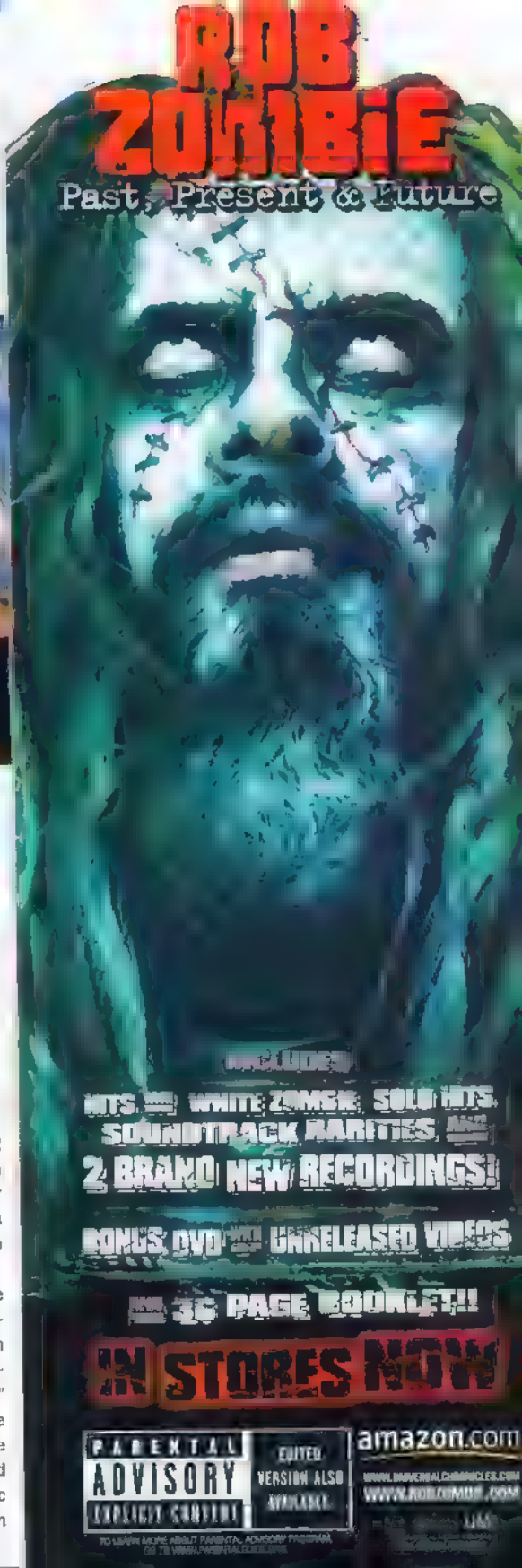
"With WildStorm, there's a certain energy that comes out of their books that we want to transfer over to our books," explained DC editor-in-chief Dan DiDio

Two six issue mini-series, *The Question* from writer Rick Veitch (*Aquaman*) and artist Tommy Lee Edwards (*Disavowed*) and *Vigilante* written by Micah Ian Wright (*Stormwatch Team Achilles*) and penciled by Carlos D'Anda (*Robotech*), will follow Brian Azzarello (*100 Bullets*) and Lee Bermejo's (*Batman/Deathblow*) *Lex Luthor: Man of Steel*, which puts a twist on the Lex-Superman dynamic. Lex sees himself as the hero out to protect people from a dangerous alien calling itself "Superman." *The Question* and *Vigilante* aren't as directly tied to Supeman, but instead deal with threats to Metropolis he can't handle

Vigilante, whose identity will remain a mystery until the end of the series, hunts down the Enrons of the world—the white-collar criminals. "In the 1980s, Vigilante was a nut with a gun who went after common criminals," explained Wright. "He's still a nut with a gun—I just changed the targets."

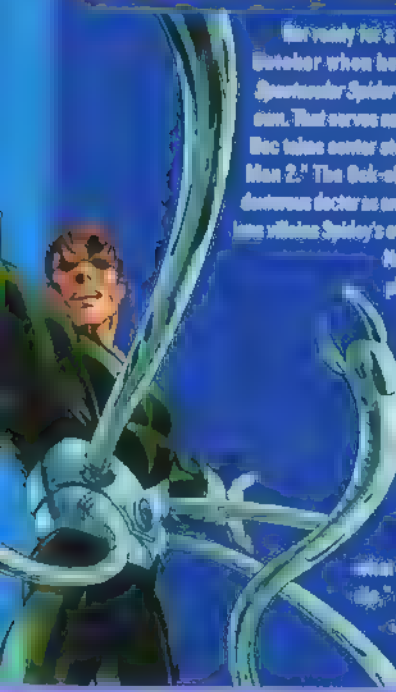
While Vigilante is in the streets looking up, the Question is up in the towers looking down. He regards the city as a living entity and looks at what hurts the city itself taking a shamanistic approach to crimefighting.

"An Aborigine relates to the river, mountain or tree in a certain way, and the Question relates to the city's infrastructure in the same manner," revealed Veitch. "A strange threat to Metropolis' favorite son draws him to the city and he uses every sign, from traffic patters to paint chips, to piece together the mystery. The question is, do these clues mean something or is he just insane?" ■ TC



CHARACTER TO WATCH

DOCTOR OCTOPUS



Get ready for a smarter, saner Doc Ock this October when he launches a comeback in *Spectacular Spider-Man* and a mini-series all his own. That serves as a prelude for 2004 when the Doc takes center stage as the villain in "Spider-Man 2." The Sci-Kaught aims to redefine this dastardly doctor as one of the most powerfully inspiring villains Spidey's ever faced.

No relaunching would be complete without a new set of duds. Designed by artist Humberto Ramos, Doc Ock's fashion upgrade debuts in *Negative Exposure* #1 (shipping Oct. 1). Then in *Spectacular* #9, Doc Ock reappears and presents Spidey with an ultimatum.

"Spider-Man either does what he says, or a lot of people die," explained Assistant Editor John Miesegaes. ■ DAVE MARSHALL

THE MATRIX REPRINTED

New trade collects Web comics into one volume

The Matrix is going offline—and onto the printed page In October, the first 12 Web comics to appear on the official "Matrix" Website (**www.whatisthematrix.com**) will be collected, along with stories that haven't appeared online, in the form of a 160 page trade paperback titled *The Matrix Comics, Volume One.* The collection—which features stories from Neil Gaiman, Howard Chaykin, Geoff Darrow, Bill Sienkiewicz and the Wachowski Bros , among others—will be published by Redpill Productions, the Internet-savvy company that launched the site before the 1999 release of "The Matrix "

The comics were published in 1998 as a cool, free extra for

fans "It started with the simple idea of doing comics on the Web, and it evolved into a much bigger thing," explained Redpill founder Spencer Lamm. "['The Matrix' directors] Larry and Andy [Wachowski] have always loved the idea of giving away free stuff to fans of the film But we've gotten tons of e-mails from fans asking when they'll be able to purchase these stories in printed form—and I know Larry and Andy want them on their shelves, too So that's why we're publishing this trade!"

Even so, Redpill doesn't plan on making any money from this decision. "We're producing this to break even, not for profit—which allows us to push up the production quality of the final product."

The cover will feature a rare collaboration between fellow Matrix designers (and comic book veterans) Darrow and Steve Skroce A hardcover edition, limited to a 5,000-copy print run, will likely follow the Volume One trade, and additional volumes are on the horizon. "We have enough to do three volumes right now," said Lamm. "By the time "Matrix: Revolutions" is released, we'll have enough for a fourth volume."

And keep your sunglasses peeled for more original Web comics in the future! "We're still hiring guys to do more stories, and we're going to keep giving these comics away on the site for free," promised Lamm ■ RH

CRANKCALLS

WE PRANK A REAL WALLY WEST!

WIZARD Can I speak to Wally West, please?
WEST: This is he.
What's up with Professor Zoom? Why's he playa hatin'?
Who is this?
Do you still feel like you're living under the shadow of your Uncle Barry?
It's Barry's world, you just live in it
Are you the fastest man alive.. *in bed*?
I am, man!
Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
It's a *great* thing!
Just being really fast is kinda dumb; think you could learn to shoot beams out of your eyes or something?
[*Laughs*] Have you been drinking? Yeah, I could do that
How fast can you run on a good day?
[*Silence as he figures the numbers*] 94 miles an hour!
How do you handle jock itch?
I scratch it
You ever think about running around naked to live up to your moniker, the Flash?
Every day, baby!

DH HATCHES 'ESCAPIST' PLAN

Chabon brings 'Kavalier & Clay' to comics

The Escapist just got nabbed—by Dark Horse Comics. The publisher will team with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon this December to release *Michael Chabon Presents...The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist*, an 80-page quarterly comic anthology that spotlights characters and concepts created by Chabon in his novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*.

Set in the late 1930s and early '40s, the novel tells the tale of the Escapist's two creators at the dawn of the comic book industry. The anthology will feature the Escapist and his supporting cast set in the style of past comic book eras from the '40s up through the modern day.

Chabon will serve as creative guide while contributing original stories. Other creators involved in the project include Howard Chaykin (*American Century*), Kevin McCarthy (*Casual Heroes*) and professional animator Eric Wight ("Batman Beyond").

The anthology series has been in the works for some time, says Dark Horse President Mike Richardson.

"We're very excited. I'm a big fan of 'Kavalier and Clay,'" Richardson said. "I saw Michael at San Diego and I told him I'd like to work with him. I threw the idea at him and he liked it. It's taken a while, but we finally got to do it."

Chabon's other work includes *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, *A Model World*, *Wonder Boys* and *Werewolves in Their Youth*. His most recent project was guest editing and contributing to *McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales*.

■ AS JR.

THE ESCAPIST

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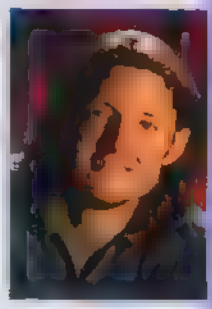
5QUESTIONS...

JOHN CASSADAY



After a hiatus that could only be calculated by NASA scientists, *Planetary*, the mind-blowing sci-fi/superhero extravaganza by Warren Ellis and John Cassaday for DC/WildStorm (see p. 58), is back on the racks and hitting the shelves on a regular bimonthly basis (issue #17 hits Oct. 22). We caught up with Cassaday, *Wizard*'s Best Penciler of 2002, to get the scoop on his current and upcoming projects

What are your plans with *Planetary*, now that it's back on track?

I'll be staying on *Planetary* until issue #25, which is the end. And I'll be there the whole time. I can't say what that last issue will be about, but it will be a definite ending from what I know. From everything Warren Ellis hinted at, it's pretty much going to be a definitive ending. They're actually all going to die! [*Laughs*] I'm just kidding. I can't really say.

Any plans to return to drawing *Captain America*?

Yes. At some point, I have another arc or two in mind. There are a couple of options on writers. It's nothing I can go into yet, but I have ideas.

What can fans expect from *I Am Legion*, your Humanoids Publishing graphic novel?

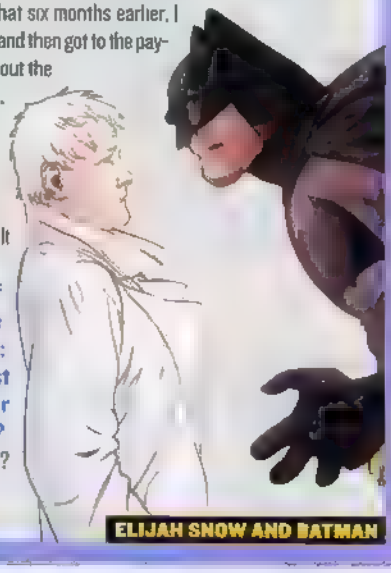
It's a very serious story. It takes place in World War II and spans all over Europe. There's a peculiar supernatural element that readers will be expecting. That's pretty much all I can say about it, as it's a complicated story

Did you ever work on something that you put your heart into that was shelved?

Before I really broke into comics, Warren and I did a book for Caliber called *Six Steel Hearts*, a six-issue mini-series, each issue about 30 pages. I finished about 29 pages of the first issue and I started getting real paying work, so I had to let it go. I still have those pages and I can look now and cringe at some of it, but I also am really happy with it too At some point, I think I'll put it up on my Website (**www.johncassaday.com**) for people to see. It would have been fun for me to have gotten through that. If I had started that six months earlier, I would have been done and then got to the paying work. But it turned out the timing wasn't there. Caliber and Warren were cool with it, then I got a series of *Ghost* covers and *Desperados* happened. It all came in at once.

Speaking of Westerns, you're from Texas; what's the coolest thing that's ever happened there?

J.R. getting shot? [*Laughs*]



ELIJAH SNOW AND BATMAN

DC FINDS FOCAL POINT

New imprint stresses powers over heroes

What happens when you introduce superpowers into a world with no superheroes?

DC answers that question come February 2004, when it launches a new imprint called DC Focus. "We're focusing on superpowers, not superheroes," explains DC's VP of Editorial Dan Didio. "We explore what happens when people receive powers and don't know what to do with them We see what happens when people *don't* make the right choices."

KINETIC

The non-DCU continuity line kicks off with four new books: *Hard Time* debuts in February with Steve Gerber (*Howard the Duck*) and Brian Hurtt (*Queen & Country*), and follows a 15-year-old convict who uses his powers to escape prison. March sees the release of *Kinetic* by Kelley Puckett (*Batgirl*) and Warren Pleece (*Deadenders*), the story of a high school loser who dreams of becoming a hero. In *Fraction*, from David Tischman (*American Century*) and Timothy Green (*Star Wars Tales*), a government-issue exoskeleton falls into the hands of a young gang. Then there's *Touch*, the story of a slimy promoter who exploits a teen with super-strength, courtesy of John Francis Moore (*X-Men: Phoenix*) and newcomer Wesley Craig. ■ **RH**

CANITBEDONE?

MIND-CONTROLLED WHEELCHAIR

PROFESSOR X

Why didn't Professor Xavier ever think of this?

Scientists in Spain and Switzerland have made breakthroughs in the development of a mind-controlled wheelchair, using electrodes in a skullcap that transmit messages directly from the brain to the chair via a wireless computer link. For biomedical engineers, brain-machine interface (BMI) systems like this one are an exciting new area of study—and there's more than one way to tackle the problem.

Explains Matthew D. Johnson, a graduate student in neural engineering at the University of Michigan: "The one practical use today converts changes in scalp EEG signals into simple output tasks like moving a wheelchair left or right. The other involves intracranial electrodes that can monitor thousands of cells at a time, allowing one to perform complex tasks such as controlling the speed of a wheelchair or controlling an onboard computer."

Right now, tests are being run with a wheeled robot that can only go left, right and forward, but if all goes well, the system will eventually be able to operate something as complex as a wheelchair.

And the best part? You won't have to be a telepath to use it! ■ **RH**

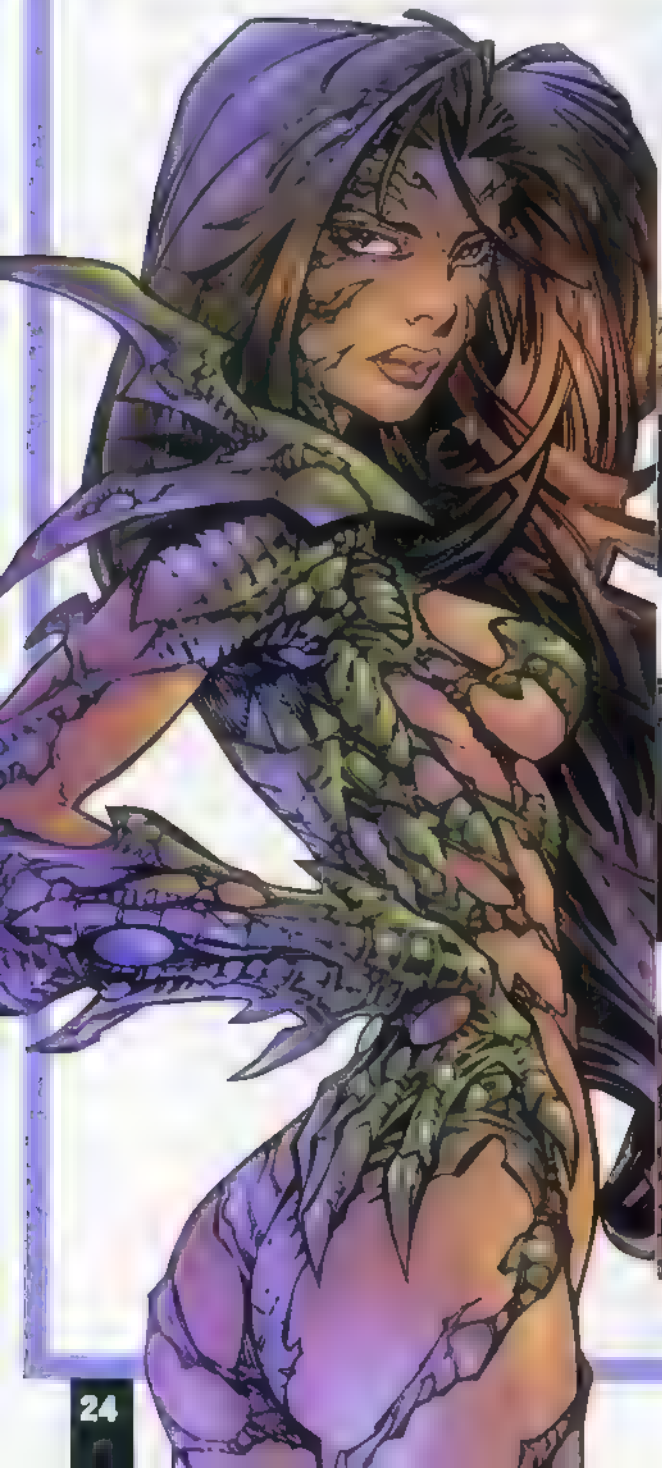
MURDER BY NUMBERS

Fans wield power of life and death in 'Witchblade' #75

The end draws near.

Doomsday will soon arrive for one unlucky member of the *Witchblade* cast, and while the when (issue #75, shipping March 2004) is set in stone, Top Cow's leaving the "who" up to the fans. A poll on the company's Website (**www.topcow.com**) will give readers of the long-running series the option to pick which hero, heroine, villain or supporting character bites the literal big one.

Wizard tracked down series scribe David Wohl to obtain his perspective on the potential DOAs and give us his odds!



WITCHBLADE-WIELDER SARA PEZZINI (LEFT)

The undisputed star of the book (hence its name), she even had her own TV show at one time. "It's extremely unlikely she'd be chosen to be offed, but stranger things have happened," Wohl says. "Especially since during Wizard World Chicago, the creative team was rumored to be talking about how cool it'd be to knock her off..."

ODDS 100-1

IAN NOTTINGHAM

Sara's love interest *cum* nemesis *cum* love interest—get the idea?

"Ian's the most popular character among the female audience (who are always asking for Francis [Manapul] to draw him shirtless)," the writer laughs. "There're many readers who would be *extremely* distressed if he was the one chosen. Plus, when he puts his mind to it, he's a kickass villain!"

ODDS 80-1

KENNETH IRONS

This charismatic, yet nutty, millionaire mastermind would be the book's most eligible bachelor—if he could only get his mind off the Witchblade.

"Fans kinda like him," Wohl offers, "but they think he's already made too many appearances in the book."

ODDS 20-1

JAKE McCARTHY

Sara's surfer-dude partner seems like a better fit for "Baywatch" than the homicide department of a metropolitan police force. "Some fans like him for the same reason they like Ian (**see above**)," the scribe explains, "but just as many see him as an annoying puppy dog who wants Sara's attention."

ODDS Even

JOE SARTI

Sara's boss, Joe's got a deep, dark secret concerning his role in the death of Sara's father, who also happened to be his former partner. "His brooding and his cryptic conversations are wearing thin with the fans," Wohl hints.

ODDS: 3-1

SIDELER

Sara's informant. "Nobody really likes him. He's pretty annoying," Wohl admits. "Sometimes he's funny, but that's probably not enough to keep him alive..."

ODDS: 3-5

LISA BUZANI

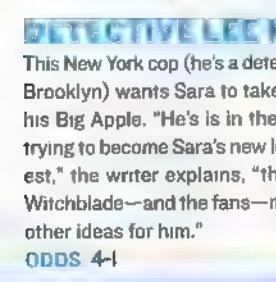
Sara keeps an eye out for Lisa, whose mom was Pezzini's best friend growing up. "Since she's so cute and friendly, someone would need to be pretty sadistic to want Lisa dead," the writer quips.

ODDS: 25-1

JULIE PEZZINI (RIGHT)

Sara's wayward sister (and Jake's current girlfriend), Julie's always up to no good. "Fans don't know what to make of Julie," Wohl notes, "so they may not be too against the idea of never seeing her again."

ODDS: 2-1



DETECTIVE LEE KIM

This New York cop (he's a detective from Brooklyn) wants Sara to take a bite of his Big Apple. "He's is in the midst of trying to become Sara's new love interest," the writer explains, "though the Witchblade—and the fans—may have other ideas for him."

ODDS: 4-1

DETECTIVE FRANK BERNARD

This no-nonsense cop's quickly becoming Sara's favorite new choice for a partner. "He has a wife and two kids, so if we kill him it'll be kinda messy," Wohl says.

ODDS: Even

VICTOR TABISCH

This manipulative doctor (and head of Level 42) is maneuvering Sara and Ian towards a showdown, just because he's curious to see how it'd turn out. "Sara and Ian will want Tabisch dead once they realize what he's doing," Wohl says, "and if the fans choose him, they'll get their wish!"

ODDS: Even

TORA NO SHI (BELOW)

Having gotten his butt kicked by Ian, the ex-assassin known as the "Tiger of Death" has become Kenneth Irons' manservant/bodyguard. "Tora now has some new nifty powers and is looking to exact revenge on Ian," Wohl says, "but Nottingham has some new abilities of his own. Tora could just as easily be vaporized in their next meeting—especially if the fans give him the thumbs down!"

ODDS: 2-1

X-PLOSION!

The 10 X-Men stories you must own before you die

Way back before Grant Morrison shook up Marvel's mutant status quo and decades before Bendis made *Ultimate X-Men* a must-read, the team of Chris Claremont and John Byrne made *Uncanny X-Men* the most groundbreaking book on the comic racks. Now *Wizard* collects 10 of the most influential—and flat out coolest—stories from the duo's acclaimed run in one 250-page deluxe hardcover edition. Need more reasons to make this part of your bookshelf?

256 REASONS TO MAKE YOU SAY HOLY GUACAMOLE!

A whopping 250-plus pages of classic X-Men tales: "Power of Proteus" (*Uncanny X-Men* #126-#128), "Dark Phoenix" (*Uncanny X-Men* #135-#137), "Days of Future Past" (*Uncanny X-Men* #141-#142) "Demon" (*Uncanny X-Men* #143) and "I, Magneto" (*Uncanny X-Men* #150) Each reprinted complete, unedited and digitally recolored.

25 THINGS THAT AREN'T REPRINTS

Bonus material includes behind the-scenes creator commentary by Chris Claremont for each storyarc, editorial extras like Sentinal blueprints, mutant psych evaluations and a really cute picture of Magneto riding a roller coaster Honest

162 DEEDS TO MAKE YOU HATE THE BAD GUYS

Mutant X. Dark Phoenix. The Imperial Guard. Sentinels. The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants The N'Garai aliens. Magneto. Bad apples all Watch them blow stuff up, kill stuff, and make for really, really cool splash pages.

3 WAYS YOU SHOULDN'T USE THE HARDCOVER

Hot plate, flotation device and a helmet It's good for everything else.

85 WACKY '80S FLASHBACKS

Back before the Internet, or either Bush president, these stories were—and remain to be—some of the coolest comics on the planet. Read them and try to spot old "E T" posters in the background

47 BADASS WOLVERINE MOMENTS

Think Wolvie's a badass now? He was totally nuts back then. He tried to kill Cyclops ("Power of Proteus"), tried to kill Nightcrawler ("Demon Knight") and totally tried making it with Jean ("Dark Phoenix"). And he fights the bad guys, too.

1 BOOK THAT COLLECTS THEM ALL!

The greatest Claremont/ Byrne X-Men stories all in one volume! From the never-before-collected-in-color "Power of Proteus" issues to the original, rarely-seen "Dark Phoenix Saga" five-page ending (Phoenix lived!), you can read the 10 greatest X-Men stories ever told in one slick hardcover!

WOLVERINE AND KITTY PRYDE

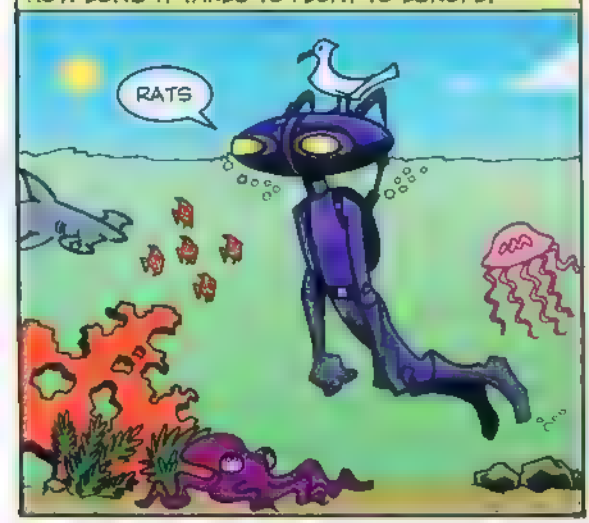
The OFFICIAL Black Manta RETRACTION PAGE

By Dave Manta

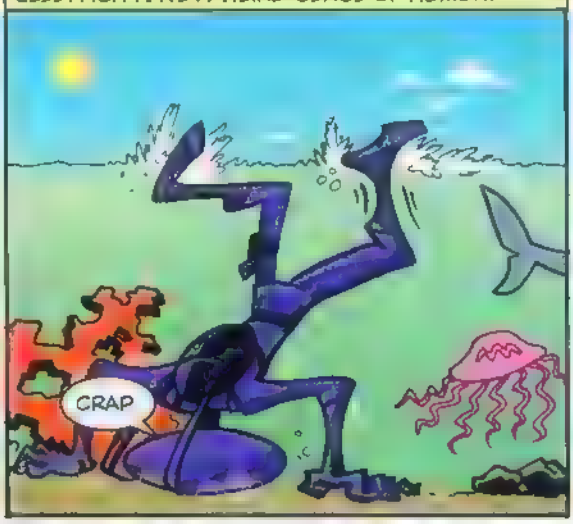
Illustrations by Ryan Dunlavey

HI.
I'M BLACK MANTA, SCOURGE OF THE SEVEN SEAS AND THAT GUY WITH THE COOL VOICE FROM "SUPER FRIENDS."
BACK IN *WIZARD* ZERO, I HAD AN OP-ED PIECE ABOUT HOW *AQUAMAN* (WHO'S A *JERK*) JUST HAD HIS BOOK CANCELLED. *AGAIN.*
BUT GUESS WHO WAS *MISINFORMED?* TURNS OUT *AQUAMAN ISN'T* CANCELLED, BUT IS GETTIN' SOME SNAZZY NEW CREATIVE TEAM WITH *ISSUE #15* (ON SALE FEB 2004), AND NOW I HAVE TO MAKE THIS BIG APOLOGY.
BUT ENOUGH ABOUT HIM. LET'S TALK ABOUT *MY HELMET!*

DAY 1: "THE FIRST TIME I TRIED IT OUT, IT WAS JUST A LITTLE TOO BUOYANT. YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW LONG IT TAKES TO FLOAT TO EUROPE?"

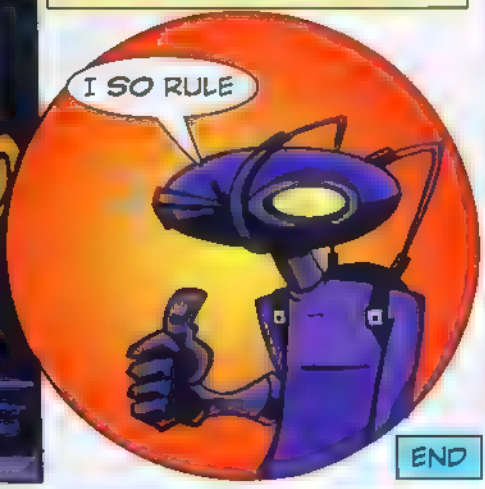


DAY 2: "I...UH...OVERCOMPENSATED THE WEIGHT FOR MY SECOND HELMET. AND FOR THE RECORD, JELLYFISH HAVE A WEIRD SENSE OF HUMOR."



"WHEN I FINALLY GOT IT RIGHT, IT WAS TIME TO DECORATE. TAPING COMIC PAGES TO THE INSIDE OF THE HELMET GAVE ME SOMETHING TO DO DURING LEGION OF DOOM MEETINGS."

"AND THE REST--HOW I JOINED THE RANKS OF THE SUPERVILLAIN ELITE ALONGSIDE LEX LUTHOR AND THAT BIG MONKEY WHO FIGHTS THE FLASH--IS HISTORY."



END

TITLEFRIGHT

1. Vault of Horror
2. Tales from the Crypt
3. Vault of Crypts
4. Bloods vs. Crips
5. Creatures on the Loose
6. Dark Mansion of Forbidden Love
7. Chamber of Chills
8. Tomb of Vaults
9. Tales from Beyond
10. Crypt of Terror
11. Journey into Fear
12. Journey into My Pants
13. Ghostly Weird Tales
14. Crypt of Shadows
15. Snowman Horror Show
16. Two-Fisting Tales
17. House of Terror
18. Where Monsters Dwell
19. Where Creatures Roam
20. Who Farted, I Smelt It?

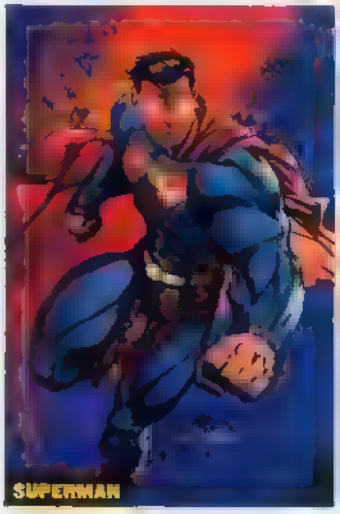
MAN-WOLF LOVES BACON!

TALENT SEARCH

Turner, Caldwell sign on for Superman mini

It looks like Michael Turner and company just couldn't stay away from Superman.

After the superstar artist recently signed on to pencil the second arc of writer Jeph Loeb's best-selling *Superman/Batman* series, Turner was looking for a project at DC for his former protégé and current studio mate Talent Caldwell (*Fathom: Killian's Tide*) to work on. With no luck finding one, the *Fathom* creator decided to write his own.


SUPERMAN

Turner will co-write the weekly, six-issue mini-series, currently titled *Superman: Godkiller* and scheduled to launch in February 2004, with *JLA* writer Joe Kelly while Caldwell provides art.

"After talking about several different options, [DC VP of Editorial] Dan DiDio said that they needed someone to work on several key issues that were transitions to the new Superman relaunches," explained Turner. "Once we began discussing the story and some ideas for it, DC really liked a lot of our concepts and characters."

According to Caldwell, a newcomer to the "Big Two" publishers (Marvel and DC), the idea of drawing one of the most recognizable characters in the world wasn't a daunting experience.

"We're going to be starting some things in this series that people will be building on for a long time to come," revealed Caldwell. "That's a huge opportunity and one I don't think anyone would pass up."

Prior to the mini-series, there will be some huge changes in the Superman line in preparation for the new creative teams of Brian Azzarello and Jim Lee on *Superman*, Greg Rucka and Matthew Clark on *Adventures of Superman* and Chuck Austen and Ivan Reis on *Action Comics* in March. And, as an added bonus for fans, each issue of *Godkiller* will feature 11-page back-up stories by each of the new creative teams.

"This storyline explains that event and leads into the new Superman books set to premiere after our issues come out," said Turner. "Superman wakes up and finds himself on Krypton, living the perfect life he's always wanted. As he starts to explore this world, he begins to find out everything isn't as perfect as he thought. Since these issues will be coming out weekly, we have several surprises planned that will definitely catch people off guard." ■ MC

DeMATTEIS MAKES MAGIC IN 'ABADAZAD'

Scribe conjures 'Harry Potter'-like fantasy tale

BOLD DIGGER Lanky Man was always the odds-on favorite to win Abadazad's annual nose-picking contest, for obvious reasons.

CrossGen's looking to make a little magic this December.

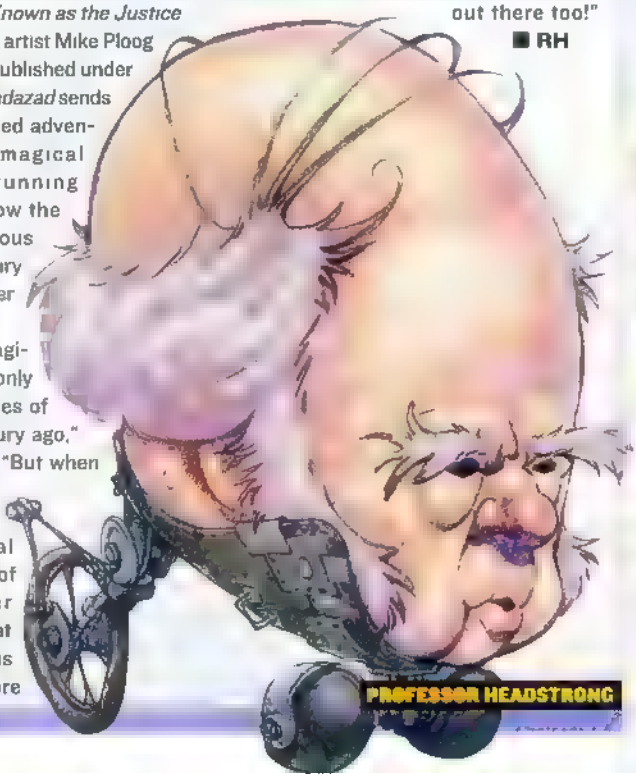
That's when the publisher enters the realm of storybook fantasy with *Abadazad*, a coming-of-age fantasy tale by writer J M DeMatteis (*Formerly Known as the Justice League*) and legendary artist Mike Ploog (*Werewolf by Night*). Published under the Code 6 imprint, *Abadazad* sends readers on a fast-paced adventure filled with magical characters and stunning imagery as they follow the journey of the rebellious teen Kate through a fairy tale land in search of her missing brother.

"Abadazad is a magical land that Kate has only known through a series of novels written a century ago," explained DeMatteis. "But when she suddenly finds herself journeying through the real Abadazad in search of her beloved brother Matt, she discovers that the truth of Abadazad is far stranger—and more amazing—than fiction!"

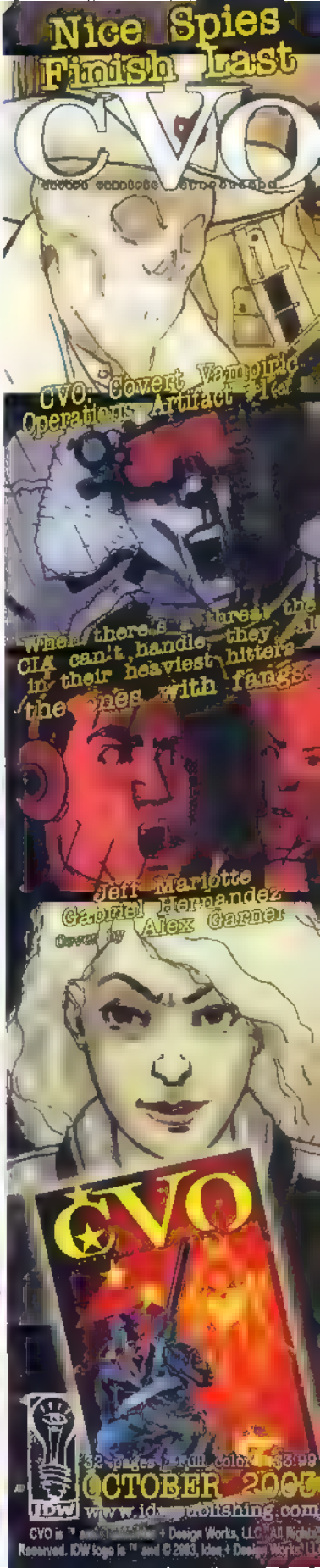
For DeMatteis, *Abadazad* has been years in the making. "I've felt that the comic book business has, with rare exceptions, ignored young readers," said the scribe, "and I've had a profound desire to do smart, literate, beautifully illustrated comic book stories in the tradition of C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, Dr. Seuss."

Teamed with the beautiful renderings of Silver Age master Ploog (who after years as a designer and storyboard artist in Hollywood returns to penciling a monthly book for the first time in over a decade), DeMatteis is finally poised to bring his fantastic visions to life. "I think *Abadazad* can fill that niche of kid-friendly fantasy—and I hope we're the first of many," offered the scribe. "My roots are deeply embedded in *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and my daughter's a total Pottermaniac. Just look at all the wonderful books that are out there in the children's/young adult's section of your bookstore—and then imagine how many amazing comics and graphic novels can be out there too!"

■ RH



PROFESSOR HEADSTRONG



SAM RAIMI

The 'Spider-Man 2' director swings through questions about his top secret set, the theme of the sequel and how he chose his Doc Ock

WIZARD: We hear that "Spider-Man 2" is one of the most secretive sets on the Sony lot these days. .

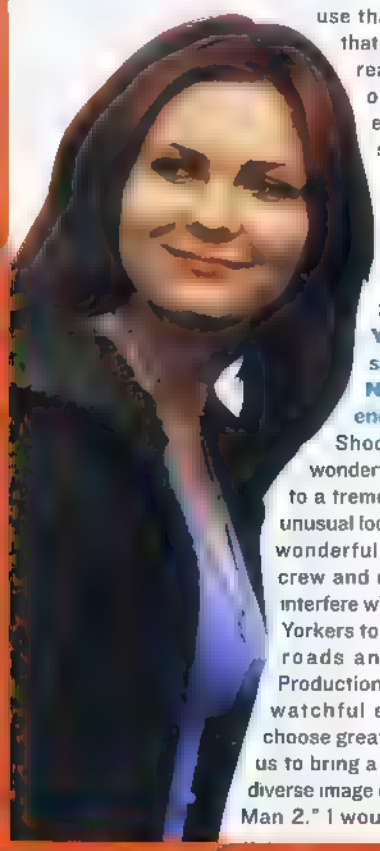
RAIMI: I don't want to create any false mystery or confound the fans. But it's similar to telling a joke. I don't want someone telling the first half of the joke, someone else saying the joke takes place in a bar, and someone else giving away the punch line. I want the audience to have the best firsthand experience of living the story as told to them by the actors.

Can you say anything about the story or themes of the second film?

"With great power comes great responsibility" has been enough over the years. We're just playing with variations on that theme

You developed a Spider-Man camera in the first film to really give fans the feeling of swinging between the skyscrapers of New York. Will you use it again?

The camera system was developed by Earl Wiggins, a great engineer, who recently passed away. It's been nicknamed the "Spydercam." We only got to use the device on one shot in the first film when Spider-Man swings through the city. It was so expensive to program and time-consuming to use that we had to limit it to that one shot. We've tried to reallocate our resources on this one to really enhance the Spider-Man sequences when he's soaring through the city. This is a great tool to provide really dizzying and beautifully elegant plates to put Spider-Man into.



You had an extended shooting schedule in New York. Was it enough time to shoot?

Shooting in New York was wonderful. We really got access to a tremendous amount of very unusual locations. The police were wonderful too at protecting the crew and making sure we didn't interfere with the daily lives of New Yorkers too much by blocking the roads and sidewalks. Under Production Designer Neil Spisak's watchful eye, we were able to choose great locations that allowed us to bring a much bigger and more diverse image of New York for "Spider-Man 2." I would have loved to have more time in New York. There was so much more we could have done there. We did get a lot of street scenes, a lot of scenes that displayed the location prominently and of equal importance was getting all of the New York plates for the optical effects that we'll put Spider-Man and Doc Ock into

"I wanted to be true to the idea that Doc Ock was older. He's a larger man, with a certain amount of heft."

SAM RAIMI

How did you choose Alfred Molina as Doc Ock?

He was simply the best actor for the job. Age was a factor. I wanted to be true to the idea that Doc Ock was an older gentleman, not Peter's age, not a young fellow. And he's got a certain amount of heft to him. He's a larger man. And I think that the great Marvel writers and artists, when creating him, realized he needed to be a big guy to believably bear the weight of these arms. But despite all the guidelines from the comic books, this is really a character Alfred is creating. Of course, he's had help from all the great writers we've had, from Alvin Sargent to Michael Chabon to [Alfred] Gough and [Miles] Millar and David Koepp. He's really performing a character that those gentlemen have been creating.

The last film ended with Harry Osborn believing that Spider-Man murdered his father, the Green Goblin. Will Harry have a bigger role in this film?

Harry will play as large a role in this film as he did in the first one, but one more critical to the story. And James Franco is turning in an excellent performance and I'm very impressed with him so far.

We hear the script for "Spider-Man 2" is a long one. How long will the film be?

It is a long script and it'll have to be cut down to make a two-hour film. When finished it should run around two hours.

The original "Spider-Man" was an effects-heavy extravaganza, does "Spider-Man 2" have more of the same?

I think we have just about the same number of effects that we did in the first film. There's not more action and it's not on a grander scale either. We're trying to improve the quality of everything that we do in every way, though. There are time constraints on us that are more restrictive than the last film. I just hope we're successful. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

NEVER '2' MUCH Kirsten Dunst's Mary Jane Watson (left) factors heavily into the script for "Spider-Man 2." Will she and Peter hook up? Director Sam Raimi ain't telling.

SHALLOW KAL Clark Kent (Tom Welling) ponders which hot chicks he'll score with this year.

PLANS at STEEL

WIZARD crashes the writers room of 'Smallville' and gets a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the making of an episode

by Richard Ho

Sharp rays from a yellow sun slant through the windows of the elongated room, reflecting off the glossy surface of a conference table.

Around this table they sit, pondering the singular question on all of their minds:

"How can we manipulate Clark Kent this week?"

To the uninitiated, these could be the fantastic musings of any number of nefarious villains from the Man of Steel's rogues gallery. But for the unique group of individuals gathered in this room, it's merely the start of another day in the office. Another day devoted to mapping out the life of the most powerful being on earth. These are the caretakers of the *Boy* of Steel—and this is where they shape his destiny.

Welcome to the writers room of "Smallville."

Hidden away in a *Daily Planet*-like building in the middle of the Warner Bros. lot, the creative minds responsible for guiding the WB sensation to soaring heights in its first two seasons continue to plot every twist and turn in the lives of Clark, Lana and the rest of the beloved "Smallville" gang. Led by series creators and executive producers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, and joined by fan-favorite comic scribe Jeph Loeb, the 10-person writing staff of "Smallville" enters its third tour of duty with one goal in mind: reward its fiercely loyal fan base

by breaking new ground and stretching the characters and stories to their limits—and beyond.

"The goal with Season Three is to really challenge ourselves to keep the stories fresh and do different things, and not fall back and get complacent," notes Millar. "We've got a great and very loyal audience, but we never take that for granted."

On this particular day, the "Smallville" scribes are throwing open the doors to their inner sanctum, offering *Wizard*'s readers unprecedented access to their creative process. Here's your chance to grab a seat at the table and see an episode take shape before your very eyes.

NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE

Clark Kent grew up in the cornfields of Kansas, and Tom Welling films his scenes in the beautiful Vancouver countryside. But Los Angeles, Calif., is the true home of "Smallville," and the writers wouldn't have it any other way.

There's nothing really "super" about the room... at first glance. Like any other comfy conference room in L.A., the "Smallville" writers room is anchored by a long, sleek table in its center, surrounded by ergonomic chairs. The walls are adorned with movie posters, three dry-erase boards covered with scrawled notes and a production schedule. But the only thing that screams "Smallville" is the collection of super-scribes around the table.

The ring of writers starts with Loeb, the man who introduced red Kryptonite in the popular episode "Red." To his right, you'll find Darren Swimmer, the scribe with episodes such as "Duplicity" (which revealed Clark's secret to Pete Ross) to his credit. His co-writer, Todd Slavkin, sits across from him. At the head of the table is Kelly Souders, the female voice of reason and co-writer of several episodes, including the introduction of Lex's brother Lucas in "Prodigal." Her partner-in-crime, Brian Peterson, sits to Todd's right. To Todd's left is Mark Verheiden, the man who penned Clark's discovery of X-ray vision in the aptly titled "X-Ray." Newcomer Drew Greenberg ("Buffy the Vampire Slayer") rounds out the staff and occupies the seat at the other end of the table.

Today, the writing staff begins the process of "breaking" Episode #5 (see sidebar **p. 40** for glossary of screenwriting terms). While Millar heads to his office to speak with the studio, Gough strolls up to the table and takes an empty seat.

As he settles into his chair, the creative dam bursts.

CAUGHT IN A BRAINSTORM

Imagine a hurricane of ideas swirling around an unusually calm center, and you've got a pretty good idea of how the "Smallville" writers room operates.

At the beginning of every breaking session, the writers establish the main thrust for the episode in question. For the fifth episode of the new season, the goal is simple: introduce viewers to Perry White.

Nothing is set in stone at this early stage. "We hear a million ideas, and we throw them around to see what sticks and what doesn't," explains Loeb. "And we fully expect the story to go through a dozen different versions within the first half-hour."

Season 3 of "Smallville" will introduce a somewhat slimy Perry White, and super-hearing should make its debut sometime during mid-season.

SUPER SMOOCH Good thing Lana (Kristin Kreuk) hasn't noticed Clark putting gum behind her ear.

PLOT THREADS Lex and Lucas Luthor (Michael Rosenbaum and Paul Wesley, both on right) discuss why Pete Ross (Sam Jones III) ain't cool enough for a dark jacket.

"I think it's safe to say you won't be hearing any 'Great Caesar's Ghost!' from him."

Consulting Producer Jeph Loeb on Perry White's "Smallville" appearance

While everything gets filtered through the prism of Gough and Millar—who pop in and out of the room throughout the day to take care of other business—the head honchos encourage all sorts of crazy concepts cooked up by their team.

But there's method to the madness, as the writers stick to trusty rules of structure—from beats to arcs and everything in between—while shaping the ever-evolving story.

It's the ultimate crash course in television writing—and it all happens before lunch.

ANATOMY OF AN EPISODE

This ain't the Perry White we know and love.

"I think it's safe to say that you won't be hearing any 'Great Caesar's Ghost!' from him," chuckles Loeb as the writers work on hashing out the grizzled journalist's backstory. So far, they've determined that the "Smallville" version of Perry will be the ultimate sensational journalist, a DCU version of Geraldo Rivera. A graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism, Perry's dreams of winning a Pulitzer Prize are sidetracked by years of trashy celebrity reporting for "Newsmakers" (an actual tabloid news show that exists in the DCU).

Here's where things get tricky. The writers want to use the Perry subplot to set up a basic chain of events: After a particularly big screw-up, Perry's producers ship him off to Smallville to cover a boring story. While chasing the story, he stumbles across an even bigger one: Clark. At some point during the episode, Clark will use his powers to save Perry, setting up Clark and Perry's future association at the *Daily Planet* and introducing a few interesting wrinkles into the Lex, Lana and Chloe subplots. And by the time the credits roll, Perry's character arc (see sidebar on p. 40) should take him from jaded cynic all the way back to the model of journalistic integrity.

But how do we get there? The discussion begins.

"What's the theme of the episode?" asks Gough.

"Truth," replies Loeb.

"But that's intellectual," says Gough. "What about the emotional?"

After a brief pause, Souders comes up with the answer. "How about discovery?"

That pulls the writers into the sticky issue of Perry's motivation. They've already established that he's chasing a story in Smallville—now they have to come up with the story. Does he travel to Smallville to do a fluff piece on Lana Lang—the little girl on the cover of *Time* magazine who lost her parents in the famous meteor tragedy 13 years ago—and accidentally discover Clark in the process? Or does he use the Lana story as a cover for a far more insidious purpose—to expose a dark secret of Lex's, for instance?

"What if Perry uses Lana as a cover to get to Lex?" wonders Swimmer. "And in the meantime, he discovers all this weird stuff going on in this town. We're already emphasizing Perry's unsavory qualities, so why not make his character even shadier?"

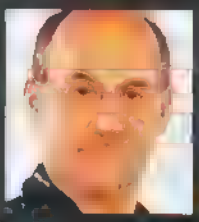
But no matter how shady they make him at first, the writers must keep in mind the arc they've laid out for Perry and bring him back to the light by the end of the episode. "Whether he realizes it or not, he's trying to find himself, and he'll eventually return to pursuing his dream," affirms Gough. "Maybe Perry looks at his Smallville story after it's done and sees that there's no real news—that all he's done is open old wounds and tug at heartstrings for personal aggrandizement—and decides to quit 'Newsmakers.'"

And that's just the beginning. Every little detail of every episode undergoes this kind of debate and scrutiny, often going through dozens of variations on the way to a final script. Story elements and angles get discussed and discarded, often sparking better ideas, and the final onscreen product can be radically different from what you hear in this room.

"Originally, we opened on Perry filming a segment on the roadside next to the billboard with the meteor," explains Loeb.

SCREENWRITING 101 with JEPH LOEB

The veteran writer-turned-television scribe explains some common screenwriting terms



BREAKING AN EPISODE: "This is the process of taking the story from an idea all the way through to the very detailed scene-by-scene, with snippets of dialogue and an outline," explains Loeb. "At one point [writer] Kelly Souders and I have all we have is, 'Clark puts on school ring with Red K in it and he changes.' Well, what does that mean? Does his head turn into a giant red ant? Do his powers disappear? That's where we start. Then, going beat by beat, then scene by scene, we essentially start to build the story. So while it's called 'breaking,' it's actually more like 'building.'"

THREE AND FOUR ACT STRUCTURE: "This is something that is more from classic storytelling," says Loeb. "Act One, introduces all your characters and what the main hero's problem is. Act Two, plan how your hero achieves his or her goals. During Act Two, the plan is usually acted upon—but there's a problem. Act Three is the resolution. In one-hour television, the act breaks are similar, but there are four acts (think in 15-minute quarter hours). But essentially, Act Four is the same as the traditional Act Three described above. Similar to an epilogue."

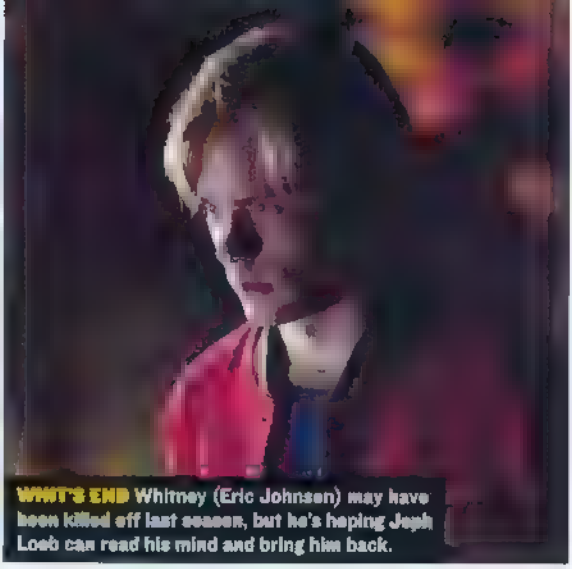
CLARK IN "RED"

CHARACTER BEATS: According to Loeb, "These are the moments that the character goes through in the story. Clark gets Red K ring. Clark changes into Bad Clark [above]. Clark pushes his relationship with Lana, Lex and his dad. Clark decides to leave for Metropolis. Clark turns really bad and needs to be saved. Beats."

CHARACTER ARC: "These are more overall stories for the season," notes Loeb. "Season One focused on Clark's journey of 'What Can I Do?' Season Two was more Clark's journey of 'Who Am I?' Each are has twists, turns, complications and adventures. Each character has an arc as well, so it's not just for Clark."

TEASER: "The opening segment of an episode, right before the credits. A good teaser will drag you right into the show. Dash ... gotta see what happens next!"

■ NM



WHIT'S END Whitney (Eric Johnson) may have been killed off last season, but he's hoping Jeph Loeb can read his mind and bring him back.

"Perry's bitching up a storm, and when the camera guy plays back the segment in the van, he sees this blur go by behind Perry in the background. Perry walks down the road about 100 yards to investigate and finds the path in the corn, and we pull back to see the Kent farm in the distance." The blur, of course, would be Clark leading to the reporter on the trail of the super-teen.

Gough chimes in with a suggestion. "If Clark's running in the corn, maybe we see the corn moving, instead of the blur," says the scribe. "We've never seen someone just standing there when Clark goes by."

"Will there even be corn on set when we're filming?" ponders Slavkin. "This episode will probably shoot in August or September."

And on and on. Over the course of the day, the opening goes through even more extensive overhauls, as the writers decide to bump the Clark-saves-Perry scene—originally slated for the end of the third act—up front, establishing the Perry/Clark relationship much sooner.

Of course, what the final scene will look like on TV is anyone's guess!

LEX IN EFFECT

The writers now turn their attention to the enigmatic Lex. They've been toying with the idea of making the episode more Lex-centric, somehow linking the young Luthor to an ulterior motive of Perry's. The question now becomes: How far do we take it?

"Maybe Perry is investigating a toxic dump, something discovered by LexCorp that Lex doesn't know about," suggests Peterson. "Or something related to Clark's blood studies."

"We could create antagonism between Perry and Lex by saying that Perry did an inaccurate exposé on Lex," offers Verheiden. "And that explains why Lex warns Lana away from Perry."

As it turns out, Lex isn't the only character with misgivings about the out-of-town reporter. Chloe, Smallville's own fledgling newshound, will also harbor distrust for Perry.

"One of Chloe's character beats [see sidebar] involves Perry walking into the *Torch* and seeing her Wall of Weird," says Loeb. "He feels an affinity toward her because he thinks she fabricates news—just like him! Of course, Chloe finds him disgusting and tells him that she'll never be like him. And she keeps telling Clark that Perry's scum."

Before the episode is done, she may be forced to do something about it. And there's a chance that the consequences

VIRTUAL SMALLVILLE

"Smallville Ledger" gives fans of the show an online destination to supplement their weekly television fix

If you think the "Smallville" experience begins and ends on Wednesday nights, think again.

For the past two seasons, fans of the show have been heading online to surf the super-cool collection of official "Smallville" content designed by Director of New Media Mark Warshaw. It all starts with the *Smallville Ledger* (www.smallvilleledger.com), the online version of Smallville's own village newspaper. With links to stories that reference actual events in the episodes (like Lex going berserk with a nine iron), the Ledger boasts a level of continuity and interactivity that makes the site wildly popular with fans.

"The website is known for playing off the show and extending the viewer experience of 'Smallville' beyond the weekly hour on television," explains Warshaw. "Al and Miles have been great about allowing me to integrate stuff, and it's just more fun for fans when things click together. So my job is to click things together."

Warshaw also created the popular "Chloe Chronicles"—online clips that feature Chloe Sullivan (Alison Mack) reporting on various strange happenings from around town—as well as the official website of the *Torch* and the online version of the "Wall of Weird." And according to the web guru, fans can expect plenty of new surprises this season. "We're shooting to achieve an even greater level of interconnectedness with the show," reveals Warshaw. "All the websites will be working together toward one common story, and fans can expect quicker storylines to coincide with everything going on with the show."

Smallville.net will be the new starting point for all online "Smallville" content. More 'Chloe Chronicles' are on the way, the "Wall of Weird" will be expanded to coincide with events from Season Three, and many new online features will be available through the Season One DVD. And keep your eyes peeled for the Luthorcorp Intranet, where you'll even be able check out Lex's email! ■ PH

won't be peachy-keen for her career.

"Even though she doesn't know Clark's secret, she still wants to protect him from Perry's investigation," says Loeb. "So if she's got any integrity left [after agreeing to supply Lionel Luthor with files on Clark in Season Two], she'll have to come up with a way to save him. Maybe she lies to Perry, and that ends up destroying her future." In other words, Chloe's actions set up her fall from grace and—for hardcore fanboys—explain why we never see an adult Chloe in DCU continuity.

KENT HARDLY WAIT

But as Millar reminds everyone towards the end of the day, "Smallville" ultimately revolves around Clark Kent—which means the writers constantly have to think of ways to bring the story back to their leading man.

The biggest problem for Clark? His relationship with the manipulative Perry. After Clark saves his life in the revised teaser, the grateful Perry latches onto his hero and asks him to be his guide in Smallville.

"Perry essentially kisses Clark's ass, asking him to take him around as a friendly local face," explains Gough. "Clark is usually a good judge of character, but what if we flip it here? He *doesn't* think Perry's all that bad, and when Chloe insists that he's scum, he wonders if Chloe is jealous that Perry picked him instead of her. The big reveal will be that he's been duped."

Just another angle to debate. But one thing is certain. The episode *must* end with Clark "saving" Perry White in a much more personal way—by having him become the person he once was. "He'll essentially invert the slimy Perry White and turn him back into the idealistic Columbia grad," says Loeb. "And that will answer the question, 'Why does Perry hire Clark?' The episode should end with Perry saying, 'If you ever need anything in Metropolis, give me a call.'"

NOW LEAVING SMALLVILLE...

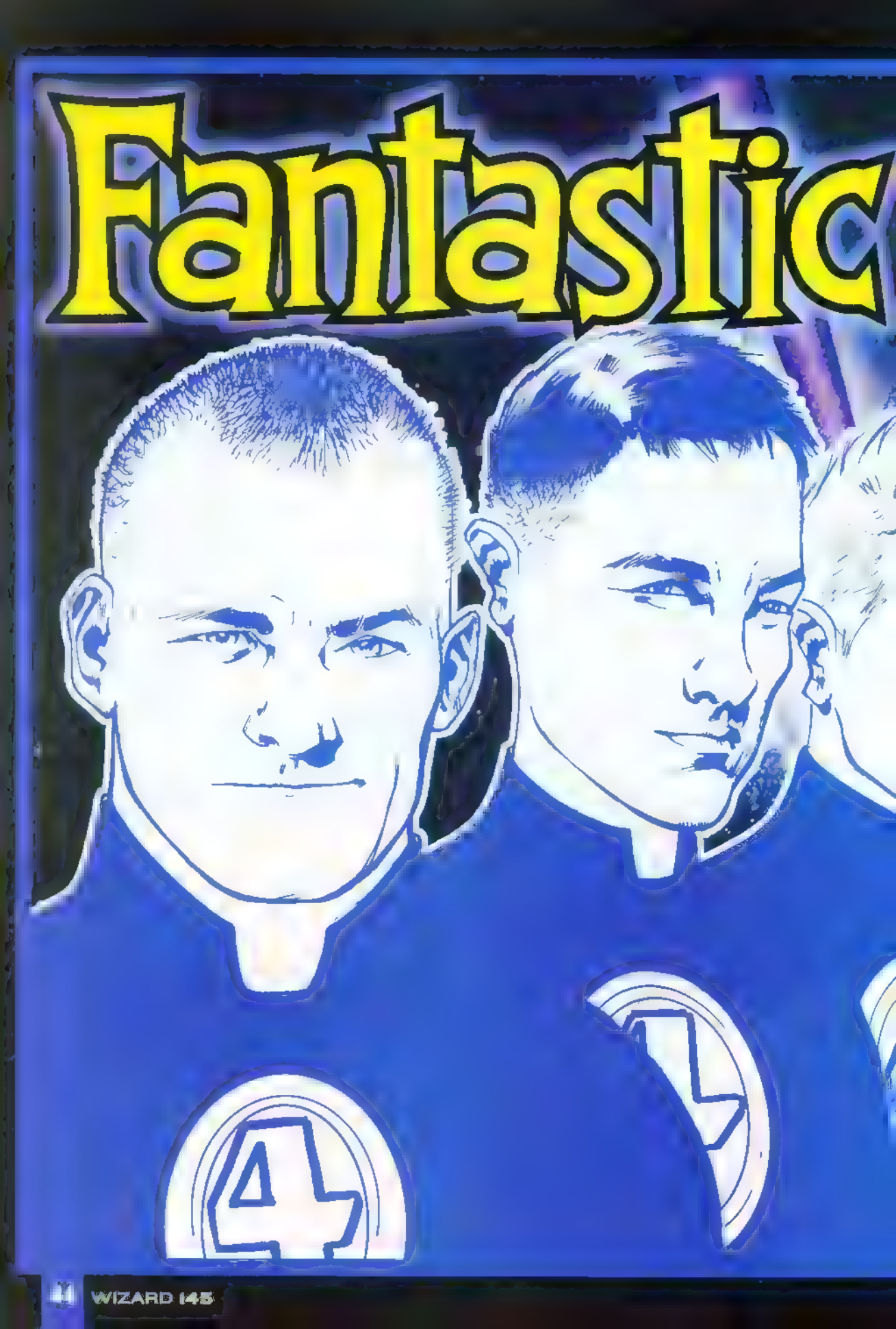
The clock ticks towards 6:00 p.m., and closing time for the intrepid writing staff of "Smallville" is just around the corner. Episode #5 is still a long way from the scripting phase—but the scribes are off to a promising start. And with several episodes of Season Three in various stages of scripting, filming and post-production, the "Smallville" train is chugging along toward an Oct. 1 premiere.

As the yellow rays fade into California dusk, the writers begin to disband for the evening. One by one, the caretakers of the strongest boy on earth retreat to the rest and solitude of their personal fortresses. When they gather again tomorrow, the pressure will be slightly greater, the stakes will be slightly higher, but the overriding question will remain unchanged:

"How can we manipulate Clark Kent *this* week...?" W

Staff Writer Richard Ho longs for a day when people will meet to decide how to manipulate him on a weekly basis.

EPISODE #894? Lex: "Get a haircut, hippie." Clark: "Don't you like my bowl?"


Fantastic
4

Voyage

By Mike Cotton

Enter Marvel's inner sanctum for an exclusive look at the very first summit meeting to create 'ULTIMATE FANTASTIC FOUR'

Joe Quesada needed to make a decision.

In May, the Marvel editor-in-chief found himself in a quandary. After a year of discussions with *New X-Men* writer Grant Morrison about penning *Ultimate Fantastic Four* fell apart, he pondered the two pitches for the next big Ultimate launch sitting in front of him. He had to choose

between friends.

Would it be Brian Michael Bendis, who inaugurated the line in 2000 with scripts on *Ultimate Spider-Man* and has wowed fans with witty and realistic dialogue? Even though he recently added *Ultimate X-Men* to his hit list, Bendis was keen to do it.

Or would it be Mark Millar, who was tagged for his high-octane widescreen revamps on the best-selling *Ultimate X-Men* and *The Ultimates*? Feeling proprietary about the line, Millar actively pursued the FF gig, for fear it could go to someone from the outside.

For Quesada, it was like a father choosing between his children. Both were instrumental in the success of Marvel's hottest comic line. Ultimately, one had to be told no.

"It's a good problem to have," he thought out loud, running his hands over his face.

He wished he could take them both and merge them into one super-scribe who could produce an FF series as groundbreaking as the original created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

Then Bendis called from his Portland, Ore., home. Quesada detailed his dilemma, and was met with a silent pause.

"Could Mark and I write it together?" asked Bendis. "Maybe Mark could do his bombastic-style stuff and I do my talking heads jibber jabber. Do you think that'd work?"

Quesada immediately called Millar.

"That'd be f---ing wild," exclaimed the writer in his thick accent from his native Scotland. "When can we start?"

"Okay, both of you will need to come to New York then," explained Quesada. "Then we'll work out all the details."

HITCH IN THE PLANS

***Ultimates* artist Bryan Hitch was tapped to design the Ultimate Fantastic Four costumes.**

"I tried to design a jumpsuit, something they could wear with jackets possibly, and go about town," Hitch says. "I looked at extreme sports stuff rather than comic books. We also took into account how they looked before—the key elements like the '4' symbol. But we wanted to make them look as contemporary as possible."

MR. FANTASTIC

"We knew we wanted to make Reed Richards younger. With the benefit of hindsight, I knew Reed stretches, so what I tried to do with him—even before he gets his powers—is make him tall and thin. He's a thinking guy. He wouldn't be very muscular. And as a nod to the Kirby look, even though he's young, I've shaved the sides and back of his head. It gives it that lighter color around the ears."

THE PLAYERS

Fast-forward to late June, as Bendis strides into Marvel's spacious conference room, side by side with Marvel President Bill Jemas, who will also develop the new series. Quesada and Millar await them, rounding out Marvel's own "fantastic four."

"Reed Richards is a genius," Bendis starts, off-handedly.

"No, he's a super-genius," retorts Millar, leaning back in one of the room's more comfortable chairs.

"Exactly, he's the kind of guy who invents the Internet," chuckles Bendis, as Quesada moves to the head of the table.

"We're getting ahead of ourselves," explains Quesada. "First things first, what stays and what goes? What works with the Fantastic Four and what do we need to change for the Ultimate Fantastic Four?"

Everyone pauses, considering exactly how much Lee and Kirby's original vision of Marvel's first family is canon.

Every fanboy knows the FF's simple origin: super-scientist Reed Richards drags girlfriend Sue Storm, her kid brother Johnny and buddy/pilot Ben Grimm to test a theory by stealing a rocket ship. The voyage goes awry when the quartet get exposed to cosmic rays, crash to Earth and learn the rays granted them each superpowers. In 1961, that's a heckuva origin, but...

"It just doesn't work in 2003," says Bendis, squashing the notion that four 20-somethings could steal a space shuttle today.

Instead, the revised origin kicks off at a military think tank, which employs the best and brightest of the Ultimate world's youth, Reed being one it's stars. In the classic FF, Reed was an older scientist who gained the ability to super-stretch every molecule in his body. Much younger and possibly even smarter than his Marvel Universe counterpart, the Ultimate Reed shines as the wonder boy of the think tank, and will develop his powers in the first arc. The means by which these powers come from remains a secret.

Interestingly, the creators place Sue more on Reed's intellectual level, making it more believable that she'd be attracted to him. She's a more "three-dimensional thinker" than Reed, according to Bendis. Originally, the classic Sue pined for Reed as merely a love interest—even when she gained her powers of invisibility. Ultimate Sue works as Reed's colleague. "She's the one with the imagination," says Millar. "She comes up with the practical applications for Reed's inventions."

But don't expect any code-

names such as Reed being named Mr Fantastic or Sue labeled the Invisible Woman—for most of the series' first year, the team goes underground, and doesn't reveal their names to the public

And the other half of the Fantastic Four doesn't mind. Ben Grimm—a.k.a. The Thing—is a longtime friend of Reed's. He's a blue-collar laborer who, much like his classic counterpart, transforms into a huge hulking, rocky monstrosity that can lift 85 tons. And seeing as how it's a permanent condition, he has a lot of difficulty coming to terms with it.

The flipside to Ben is Sue's little brother, Johnny—the Human Torch—who revels in his ability to burst into flames and fly. A natural show-off, he basks in his newfound celebrity status.

The conversation turns to how arch-nemesis Dr. Doom gets involved. Doom originally appeared as a college classmate of Reed Richards that's horribly disfigured after an accident he blamed Richards for. Everyone agreed Doom needed an overhaul.

"Maybe it's the Fantastic Five," says Millar, pointing at Bendis. "Maybe they're a team and he's the fifth member. He's Pete Best from the Beatles."

"No, he should be in the same think-tank, but he's in competition with Reed and Sue," interjects Quesada. "Maybe he's working on the same project and he's trying to beat them."

For hours, the four talk and are joined by Ultimate Line Editor Ralph Macchio and Assistant Editor Nick Lowe.

The writers decide that Doom, Reed and Sue will all work on a project, describes Bendis, "so big it would literally change the world."

THE ORIGIN

As the group toils through lunch, Millar and Bendis finally settle on exactly how our merry band all come together for their fateful origin tale. First, an orphaned Ben finds a home with the Richards family, and grows up with Reed as life-long friends. Then after Reed and Sue meet in the military think tank—Millar suggests they call it the Department of the Fantastic—Ben and Johnny Storm are invited up to see their friends/family, where they eventually are all given amazing powers, which Millar sees as elemental—Johnny/fire, Sue/wind, Ben/earth and Reed/water.

Pretty soon, the writers toss out suggestions faster than anyone can possibly write down. From battles with mole people to alien invasions, Bendis and Millar want to do it all. Even Dr. Doom comes back into the discussion at Millar's behest.

"Could we have him just have a small scar on his cheek?" asks the writer. "That could show he's very, very vain."

"We already did that, Mark," Quesada chuckles. "Haven't you read *Fantastic Four*?"

The first six-issue arc sees Reed and Doom recruited for the think tank as well as the FF created, the discussion turns to what Quesada describes as the toughest step yet—picking an artist.

Names of the biz's top pencilers begin flying around the room. Names like John Cassaday (*Planetary*) and Andy Kubert (*1602*) are tossed around, but regrettably no one believes they could meet the rigid deadline so the first issue could ship in December. Finally, one name becomes the front-runner—Adam Kubert, the original *Ultimate X-Men* artist, who was floating between projects. But would he want another Ultimate book? He accepts after a phone call.

THE HUMAN TORCH

"Johnny Storm was a skateboarder or a surfer," says Hitch. "He's about 17 years old and kind of a wild guy. I just gave his costume some skateboarding gloves I'd seen. With Johnny I looked at his hair and some of his costume so that when he flames on, it would create interesting lines because the flame will look differently."

INVISIBLE WOMAN

"[Marvel] wanted to make Sue Storm a little younger and sexier than I'd initially drawn her," Hitch says, though the final design is shown here. "Mark [Millar] referred me to actress Julia Stiles [as a model], but then I came across Season 1 of '24' and I decided [Elisha Cuthbert] was perfect. She became my model for Sue, but with smaller breasts."

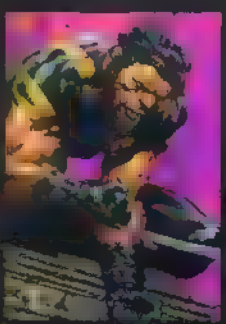
ULTIMATE MONTH

This holiday season, Marvel has the Ultimate gift for comic fans.

Beginning in December, all of the Ultimate titles, including *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate X-Men*, *Ultimates* and *Ultimate Fantastic Four* (one more has) will launch new storylines. Here's a rundown of what to expect.

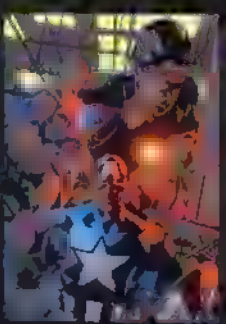
ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

December's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #50 is a double-sized issue that introduces Ultimate Black Cat. That leads into a clothes-ripping, hair-pulling cat fight between Elektra and Black Cat in issue #52, which writer Brian Michael Bendis believes "is the finest moment in the history of modern comics. In fact, I heard that after reading the script, Marvel was debating on leaving the publishing business altogether because they said, 'Comics can't get better than that.' Their words."



ULTIMATE X-MEN

Ultimate X-Men #48 begins an arc titled "New Mutants," which debuts the Ultimate versions of Angel, Dazzler, Forge, Havok and some surprises. "It has an entirely different feel than the huge action samurai quest in [issue #34-39's] 'Blockbuster,'" says writer Bendis, comparing the new arc to his first. "It basically asks the question: Are the X-Men the best role models for the mutant/human relations? Is Xavier the best person for the job? He gave it to himself—that doesn't mean he's the best person to do it."



THE ULTIMATES

In December, Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch will relaunch *Ultimates* with a second volume (it technically would have been issue #14 of Vol. 1). Picking up about six months after the events of the final chapter of the first 13 issues, this new issue will be oversized and feature the debut of Ultimate Captain Britain and a number of other UK heroes, who band together to become the UK's version of the Ultimates team in the six-issue arc.

UPCOMING...

Don't expect *Ultimate Fantastic Four* to be the last new launch from the Ultimate line. There are already talks of an *Ultimate Daredevil/Elektra* ongoing and a new top-secret project Marvel still has under lock and key.

THE SHAKEDOWN

By the end of the day Bendis and Millar race into a groove

While Bendis talks about the sci-fi bent of the series, Millar talks up the fantasy angle Bendis spouts off on a Namor debut, Millar talks about a laughable invasion of Xavier's school Then discussions turn to cryogenically frozen monkeys and the Negative Zone When Millar brings up spontaneous combustion and a "doorway to Universe B," Jemas has had enough

"I don't want to hear any more about spontaneous combustion or this doorway to Universe B," sounds off the Marvel boss

Everyone tenses

"Isn't that what the Human Torch does though?" asks Bendis

Jemas can only laugh

With the day coming to a close, Millar and Bendis finally agree on how the series will be written Millar will plot the story, which will outline major scenes and moments, Bendis will then tweak the plot dialogue it and forward it to Millar for approval.

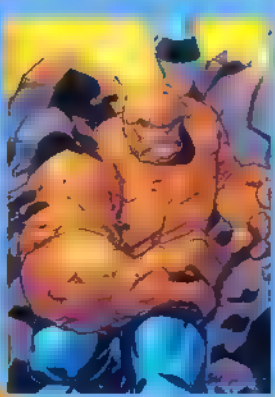
"You know, that last time I tried to do this, it didn't go too well " says Bendis to Millar, recalling his ill-fated *Ultimate X-Men* collaboration with *Wolverine* scribe Greg Rucka, which ceased when Rucka was too busy and that Bendis, admittedly, was too controlling of the story.

"Oh, that's okay this'll be a bloody disaster," says Millar before bursting into laughter "This is just a train wreck no one wants to walk away from."

Wizard Staff Writer Mike Colton knows what it's like to be involved with a train wreck. He averages one per month every issue

THE THING

"Originally, I thought in Ben Grimm's human form, he could be a much happier and confident black guy," Hitch says. "But it wasn't appropriate for the story. My look became more of a heavy browed, slightly Celtic looking, Irish guy with shortly cropped red hair. We went back to that look and made him a little bigger for his human form. When he gets his rocky hide, he's bigger but he still keeps that heavy-browed look."

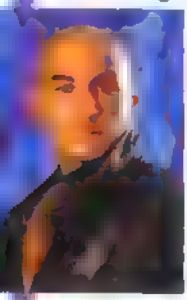


GRANT MORRISON

The writer full of 'mad ideas' exits 'New X-Men' to revamp DC's big guns and 'no-hopers'...is Superman in the cards?

WIZARD: Why leave *New X-Men* for DC Comics?

MORRISON: I'd reached the end of what I had to say on *New X-Men*. My whole run on X-Men has been designed to read as one long novel, and I finally got to the last chapter. I was feeling the need for a new direction, so everything fell into place at around the same time. Plus, DC made me an incredible offer, which allows me to create all the new material I want, as well as play around in the DC Universe.



What do have planned at DC?

I have a bunch of new series and characters I'll be launching at Vertigo. And I've been talking with [DC VP/Editorial] Dan DiDio about doing extensive work with several DCU characters. I won't be going back to *JLA*, but I will tackle some other high-profile characters, as well as some also-rans who need a boost.

What also-rans would that be?

Mostly second-string, no-hopers I'd like to lift up into the first rank by "re-imagining" the concepts—the Demon, Mr Miracle and the Metropolis Guardian are a couple characters I'd like to do. I also have some unusual ideas for Captain Marvel Jr., the Shining Knight and Manhunter from Mars. I have a lot of mad ideas about this stuff all the time and it would be impossible to indulge every whim.

You've talked about Superman a lot too.

I'd still like to do something with Superman but right now, I see more potential with some less well-known characters. I see Superman as the American Christ, simple as that. No one's yet really touched on the inspirational possibilities of that idea. After years of cowboys, soldiers, tough private eyes and gangsters at a time in the late 1930s when America's self-image was built around the use of guns as a means to tame a young and restless country—and on the eve of a world war no less—two teenage boys [Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman's creators] came up with their brilliant notion: an All-American icon hero with a code against killing. Here we have a living flag, who always uses his immense strength and super-intelligence to solve problems without leaving a trail of bodies in his wake. What a forward-thinking, utopian idea that is! Superman as the new world testament!

But before you depart for DC, how are you tackling your *New X-Men* arc with artist Marc Silvestri starting in January's issue #151? Is it your "definitive" X-Men tale?

I don't tend to think in terms of "definitive" stories on X-Men—the X-Men is a long-running soap opera, so I tend to think of it all as one big epic with incredible flashpoints along the way. The Silvestri story is set in the future and there's a whole new X-Men team with a couple of familiar, if unexpected, faces. The world is very different. The conflict is global and apocalyptic, and is one we've never seen before in an X-book. It's pretty wild...and it's also my last word on the Phoenix.

> **"I was surprised by a bizarre pang of loss when I wrote my last line of dialogue for Wolverine."**
>
> MORRISON, ON LEAVING 'NEW X-MEN'

What will you miss about leaving Marvel?

I'll miss the characters for a while. I was quite surprised by a bizarre pang of loss when I wrote my last line of dialogue for Wolverine and my final Scott Summers [a.k.a. Cyclops] scene. I'm most worried about Scott and I hope whoever comes after me looks after him—he's only just managed to find a personality and I'd hate to see him lose it again.

What else do you have coming up?

I've written the "Sleepless Knights" film script for DreamWorks, and I've done two major franchise computer games, but I can't talk about any of them because I've signed non-disclosure forms which state that I can be buggered and beheaded then hung from a bridge by my internal organs if I breathe a word of what I'm doing.

Okay, I won't ask. But tell me this: What's the best advice you've ever gotten?

The best advice was "Know when to get off stage," and it's served me well. The worst advice came from the DC staffers who, in 1995 told me, "You can't put Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern and Aquaman in the JLA. No one will buy it!"

As one of the slickest dressed men in comics, what's your advice for the stylistically challenged comic fans?

Simple. Stop looking at the Hulk and Solomon Grundy for inspiration, and try Steranko's Nick Fury instead. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

HELLO, GOODBYE Though he still pines to write Superman, Morrison felt sad writing his last *New X-Men* issues with art by Silvestri (opposite with Beak, Cassandra Nova and Wolverine).

GROUP

'WIZARD' RANKS THE BEST TEAM BOOKS IN COMICS

by the Wizard staff

RATES

In the immortal words of the classic Ambush Bug story, "Team books suck!" ■ Okay, that story may not be "immortal," and quoting an Ambush Bug tale from *Action Comics* #585 may *sound* crazy, but the sentiment still rings true. Look at Diamond's sales charts, and you'll find a horde of team-centric books dominating the top half of the list. But what makes a team book so popular? The reason is simple—in a team book, you get more heroes for your money, and if there's one mantra we live by in America, it's that more is always better. ■ "Heroes stand out more when interacting with other heroes," notes writer Geoff Johns, who pens a trio of team books in *JSA*, *Avengers* and *Teen Titans*. "That's part of the fun of a team book. Seeing them interact, how they hang together, where they go to do that. Before any team leaps into action, tell us who they are and why they're there. That way, if they get hurt or killed, people care." ■ With that sentiment in mind, *Wizard* set out to rank the best team comics being published today. Using a complicated formula that took into account characters, team dynamics, villains, writing and art, and that ever-ambiguous "coolness" factor, the *Wizard* staff holed itself up in our top-secret bunker and pored over hundreds of issues of this past year's team books and settled on a list. So sit back and enjoy *Wizard*'s list of the best team books in comics!

5. RUNAWAYS (Marvel)

IT'S BREAKFAST CLUB' MEETS 'THE FUGITIVE' WHEN SIX TEENS HIT THE ROAD TO ESCAPE THEIR SUPERVILLAIN PARENTS

Think your parents are evil for keeping the car on Friday night?

Imagine how you'd feel if they attacked you with battle axes, electrical blasts and magical spells!

When the teens in *Runaways* eavesdrop on a "charity" meeting of their Los Angeles socialite parents, they realize their parents are guilty of a lot more than grounding them on a Saturday night, namely: drug trafficking, inter-dimensional terrorism and ritual human sacrifice. With no powers, nowhere to turn, and no idea what they're doing, the six youngsters set out to blow the whistle on their parents

"One thing I never liked about comics was, whether it was Batman or Spider-Man or Superman, it was all stories about guys whose parental figures died and that inspired their heroism," rants writer Brian K. Vaughan, who co-created the Marvel series with artist Adrian Alphona. "It always seemed like a subversive thing older writers were doing, like, 'Look, parents are terrific!' I wanted to do the opposite I wanted to explore the fact that sometimes our parents lie to us and sometimes we have to do the opposite of what our parents tell us to do in order to be good people."

After witnessing their parents sacrifice a "working girl" during a bizarre ritual, the teens (Alex, Gertrude, Karolina, Chase, Molly and Nico) go on the run, tearing through their houses for clues as to why their parents dress up in dark costumes and call themselves The Pride

Once on their hunt, the kids discover that their parents' lies run deeper than they ever expected Gertrude uncovers a raptor in her basement that she can control with her mind, Chase snags a bunch of high-tech gadgets from his dad's secret workshop and Karolina snaps off her bracelet to reveal that she's actually a high-flyin', energy-blastin' alien

Even with these revelations, the kids could hardly be called a team, let alone a superteam, but *Runaways* still contains all the elements that comprise a good team book. "If these guys all went to the same school, they never would have sat at the same lunch table together," says Vaughan. "I like forcing them together in that 'Breakfast Club' paradigm of throwing a bunch of diverse kids in a room together and seeing what happens."

Capturing the banter between the teens perfectly, Vaughan's dialogue is double-stuffed with pop culture references and rapid-fire comebacks. "I'm sort of a stunted man-child," explains the 27-year-old Vaughan. "I'm still a teenager in a lot of ways, which is bad for my social life and relationships, but really good for my writing."

While L.A. is a departure from Marvel's traditional home base of NYC, Vaughan figured it was the obvious location for an evil supergroup. "Per capita there have got to be more evil people in Los Angeles than New York," calculates Vaughan "But seriously, setting it in Los Angeles means the kids can't run over to Avengers Mansion or buy Heroes for Hire and have them solve everything."

With a brand new storyarc beginning this October in issue #7, the kids find out what being a runaway really means Barely organized enough to keep thugs from casing a convenience store, the greatest challenge these kids will face (besides cooking their own dinner) will be a new, handsome, 17-year-old runaway who makes all the guys jealous, all the girls weak in the knees and threatens to tear the team apart. Between the action and the angst, now's the perfect time to hook up with Marvel's newest rebels with a cause ■ **DAVE MARSHALL**

STOP, IN THE NAME OF LOVE Karaoke never shows up in Marvel's *Runaways*, and for that, we're very, very thankful.

4. PLANETARY (DC/WildStorm)

THREE SECRET EXPLORERS BATTLE AN EVIL FANTASTIC FOUR-LIKE TEAM TO UNCOVER THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Beneath the shiny surfaces of the WildStorm universe, you'll find Planetary.

These sci-fi superheroes thrive outside of the limelight and it's in the forgotten corners of the world where they shine brightest. Elijah Snow, Jakita Wagner and the Drummer don't smack down villains or try to foil bank robberies. The team's purpose is remarkably simple and equally unique, gaining knowledge.

From gigantic movie monsters to the classic pulp heroes of yesteryear, *Planetary* reinvigorates staid and overplayed concepts with a startling sense of awe and excitement rarely found on the racks. And that's just the way writer and co-creator Warren Ellis wants it.

"All the superhero comics you ever saw, all the old monster movies, all the pulp sci-fi stories, all the strange literature of the past—they all happened," explains Ellis. "It's just that someone wanted you to never know. Planetary are a team of investigators excavating the secret history of the world."

Funded and founded by Snow, before his mind was wiped by the villainous Four, Planetary is so secret, most governments don't even know they exist, much less have a plan to thwart them.

And while Planetary seeks out what is new, strange or perhaps secret to the WildStorm universe, those things will probably seem a little familiar to longtime comic readers. From the JLA-esque team of heroes bent on destroying the planet in *Planetary* #1 to the twisted version of the Fantastic Four that make up the other side of the Planetary coin, Ellis and artist John Cassaday (*Captain America*) fling readers on a world tour of wonder, giving them a healthy dose of what made comics cool in the first place: new ideas.

"You have to remember, I read *2000 AD* as a kid, not *Superman* or whatever," notes Ellis. "So I had to learn a lot of this stuff. The conclusion all that reading brought me to is one of the driving forces of the book. These classic old superhero concepts had immense force."

Though the book has been hampered by delays over the past year, it has returned to a bimonthly schedule—in fact, readers can pick up the next issue (#17) on Oct. 22. Meanwhile, things will continue to get complicated for the architects of the unknown, Ellis says. Some of the things readers can expect?

"Jacob Greene. Period Chinese martial arts. Jungle action. The first men in the moon. Recording angels and big dumb objects," says Ellis. "And we've already met Jakita's father, you know."

Aside from a good story and hyper-detailed art, Ellis likes to think there are plenty more reasons to pick up *Planetary*.

"Because ['Buffy' creator] Joss Whedon likes it," boasts Ellis. "And if you don't, I'm going to come to your house and crap in your pillowcase. I'm on the Internet, you know. I can find out where you live."

■ **ALEX SEGURA JR.**

SNOW BLIND: Jakita (left) and the Drummer (right) constantly warned Elijah to cut back on his bleach intake.

WE WON'T MEET AGAIN, MR SNOW
YOUR TEAM CAN HEAR YOU. IF YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS FOR THEM
DON'T YOU DARE COME LOOKING FOR ME
I MEAN, DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT
BUT DO NOT LET THESE BASTARDS WIN
THESE ARE ORDERS.
GOODBYE

3. THE ULTIMATES (Marvel)

WHEN THEY'RE NOT PUMMELING ONE ANOTHER THE ULTIMATE UNIVERSE'S MOST POWERFUL HEROES STOMP SUPER-MENACES AND FOIL ALIEN INVADERS

If you're looking to get your motor running, let *The Ultimates* kick start your head with a full tank of adrenaline.

Marvel's better-late-than-never book, from the energetic mind of Mark Millar and the hyper-detailed pencil of Bryan Hitch, rips superheroes out of their four-color world and throws them into ours with cinematic flair. It's not the Iron Man, Captain America, Hulk or Thor you know from comics—they're the ones you would see on the news if they were real.

"[*Ultimates*] is about six ordinary people who find their lives turned upside down and how they deal with that," explains Millar. "The difference between *The Ultimates* and other team books is that they're a proactive force who don't really get to do anything, and so the conflicts arise from within the team itself."

Playboy Tony Stark, the world's third richest man, pilots his self-made Iron Man armor with enough vodka in his blood to put any frat boy down for the count. Readers will admire Thor's desire to help cleanse evil from the world, but his connections to the team are as tenuous as his story about being the son of a Norse god, especially considering his history in a mental hospital. Hank Pym and his wife Janet are brilliant scientists and formidable fighters as Giant-Man and Wasp respectively—but who's going to protect the secretly mutant Janet from her abusive, Prozac-popping husband? Bruce Banner's intellect rivals Pym's, and so does his temper. But when Banner gets pissed, the Hulk comes out and flattens half of New York. So what glues these misfits together? An old World War II relic named Captain America.

"Captain America is a rock," describes Millar. "He makes me feel patriotic and I'm a friggin' Scotsman!"

In issue #6, when a lovers' spat turns violent and Pym unleashes a swarm of ants on Wasp, Cap consoles her at the hospital and gives Giant-Man a fistful of his own medicine in issue #9. And it's Captain America who puts his team over the top when they take on the Hulk in New York's Times Square.

EVERYBODY ELSE FORM A PERIMETER AND LAY DOWN SOME OVER FIRE THE CAPTAIN'S ON THE WAY HERE PEOPLE
Roger that General
Tony, General is a military frequency so it's priority alert no question
Finally, when you are human

While Millar concedes that, "[The Ultimates] are more likely to get bored, get drunk and start fighting each other," he confesses, "I wanted one big adventure for them and that's the Skrulls story [issues #8-#12]."

After pumping lead and arrows into 528 alien sleeper agents, the Ultimates learn that the Chitauri's [Skrulls'] roots run deep when S.H.I.E.L.D.'s psi-division uncovers their base in Micronesia. But in issue #10, when the psi-division and other high-ranking S.H.I.E.L.D. agents are revealed to be Chitauri, Micronesia turns into Pearl Harbor with a Hiroshima-scale bombing!

You can't help but get chills from issue #11's double-page splash of the Ultimates flanked by S.H.I.E.L.D. agents ready to do what they do best: kick ass. And October's issue #12 promises to make the team's battle with the Hulk look like a slow golf game when they face off against the Chitauri once and for all! Following that melee, Millar says he plans on "thinking outside the box, in terms of where stories might go."

But don't think for a second that means the Ultimates won't have heads to bash; in fact, the next arc of *Ultimates* (shipping in December with a new #1) finds European nations forming their own version of the Ultimates, comprised of Captain Britain and Psylocke among others, to combat America's super-soldiers.

With that much action on tap, you'd better beware that *Ultimates* doesn't put your motor in the red! ■ **TODD CASEY**

FLY ON THE WALL Despite a billion-dollar budget, Captain America and the Ultimates still had a problem with insects.

2. THE AVENGERS (Marvel)

TAKING OVER THE WORLD, HALTING A DEADLY BIOLOGICAL ATTACK AND STOPPING A RAMPAGING TEAMMATE IS ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

If an Avenger doesn't assemble with his or her A-game every time out, the only thing being put together for them will be funeral arrangements.

For Earth's Mightiest Heroes, it's about doing the job right every single time against the most powerful menaces, trusting the hero next to you and putting your life on the line. That's been Geoff Johns' portrayal of the team since he took over the book in 2002 with issue #57, and it's the course he's unwaveringly followed throughout his amazing, action-packed run.

"It's all about the characters interacting, bouncing off each other and how they affect each other," explains Johns. "Captain America has got a great presence when he's leading a team, he stands out even more when he's in command."

The Captain America-Falcon dynamic is just one of the great relationships Johns has fostered in *The Avengers*. The former partners have stood together as equals, and the rest of the team has fallen in line with their respect concerning the high-flying Falcon. Throw in the volatile interplay between Ant-Man and Jack of Hearts—the two have been at each other's throat since they first got together—and *Avengers* reads like a superhero book should: a world-shaking soap opera.

"That's why the Avengers are great," notes Johns. "They have great A-listers like Cap, Thor and Iron Man, but they also have a good tradition of second-stringers, too. You can do cool stuff with great characters like She-Hulk and Black Panther and give them the spotlight and a chance to shine."

Take Johns' first arc, titled "World Trust" for example. The Avengers are used to saving the world, but when major cities all over the globe are stolen by the evil organization called the Zodiac, the Earth falls into complete chaos. It's then that the Avengers face their toughest mission ever—to save the planet, they'll have to take it over!

And that was just the appetizer. The "Red Zone" arc, which ran through issues #65-#69, finds the Avengers facing a threat unlike any they'd dealt with before: a biological attack on U.S. soil! However, the source of the contagion shocks even the Avengers, when they trace it to a secret United States bio-weapons lab and Secretary of Defense Dell Rusk—who's actually the Red Skull!

For his upcoming *Avengers* finale, Johns (who recently signed a DC-exclusive contract) crafted a four-part slugfest that should keep fanboys talking long after the story wraps—"The Search for She-Hulk" runs through issues #72-#75, and features the Jade Giantess scouring the country searching for her cousin, Bruce Banner (a.k.a. the Hulk). Needless to say, non-stop action and total destruction ensue when the Avengers, Hulk, She-Hulk, a battalion of Hulk-busters and Hawkeye all cross paths in this soon-to-be classic tale.

For his part, Johns says he's ecstatic about the way his *Avengers* run developed, and he's thrilled to be going out on such a high note. "It was great [working on *Avengers*]," extols Johns. "I'm really proud of the book, which is nice to say. I'm proud of the things we did with the characters. The fact that I got a dozen e-mails saying I better not kill the Falcon because I made him interesting was really cool!" ■ **ANDY SERWIN**

Avengers
Avengers! Leave him some more time!
I know it.
At least he's doing something!
No, they're idealistic but I'm not afraid the Super Soldier project and the Manhattan Project and the...
The guards, the majority of the men and women assigned to protect and help, had no idea what they were working on.
They were just following orders.
I see! The fool who gave them those orders.
Believe you me, we discussed all of this. That this plague could spread from our country.
Oh.
And these soldiers were part of it.

SKIN AND BONES Much to his everlasting regret, Captain America learned the hard way about the perils of using Ex-lax to drop unwanted pounds.

TEAM SPIRIT

Looking for some other team books that'll blow your mind?

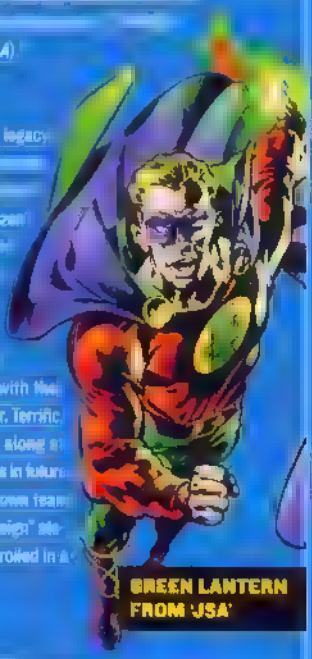
FANTASTIC FOUR (Marvel)

#500) by Waid and Howard Porter (*JLA*)

JSA (DC Comics)

...e JSA, tradition matters, and the legacy...

...Darkness" epic (*JSA* #46-#50)...two dozen... ...past and present JSAers battled teo... ...fled nail against Mordru, Eclipse and... ...Obsidian, who were trying to throw... ...Earth into eternal darkness. The wis... ...dom and power of the veterans (Flash... ...Green Lantern, Wildcat,) combined with the... ...fresh blood of rookies (Dr. Mid-Nite, Mr. Terrific, ...Star Girl) keeps this book humming along at... ...Mach I. The battles only get more furious in future... ...issues, as Black Adam organizes his own team... ...of heavy hitters as part of the "Black Reign" sto... ...-years, in which the JSA becomes embroiled in a... ...civil war.



GREEN LANTERN FROM 'JSA'

NEW X-MEN (Marvel)

ULTIMATE X-MEN (Marvel)

X-STATIX (Marvel)

...team toil. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

GROUP DYNAMICS

Why don't these teams have a monthly book?!

B.P.R.D.

We love the Dark Horse one-shots by creators such as Geoff Johns and Mike Oeming, but the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense field team (Liz Sherman, Abe Sapien, Roger the Homunculus and Johann Schmidt) are practically begging for their own regular book! Get the *B.P.R.D.: Hollow Earth* creative team of writers Mike Mignola and Christopher Golden and artist Ryan Sook (with creator Mignola providing the covers!) together again and let the groovy ghouls really cut loose!

FLASH'S ROGUES

With a golden age of kickass villain books (*Mystique*, *Arkham Asylum*) upon us, why isn't Geoff Johns writing a regular series starring the Scarlet Speedster's revitalized Rogues Gallery? Johns not only transformed once-laughable fiends such as Captain Cold and the Weather Wizard into red alert-level threats, but he co-created new rogues like the murderous psychopath Murmur and cult leader Cicada that forced the Flash to slow down in order to think of ways to defeat them!

FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE JUSTICE LEAGUE

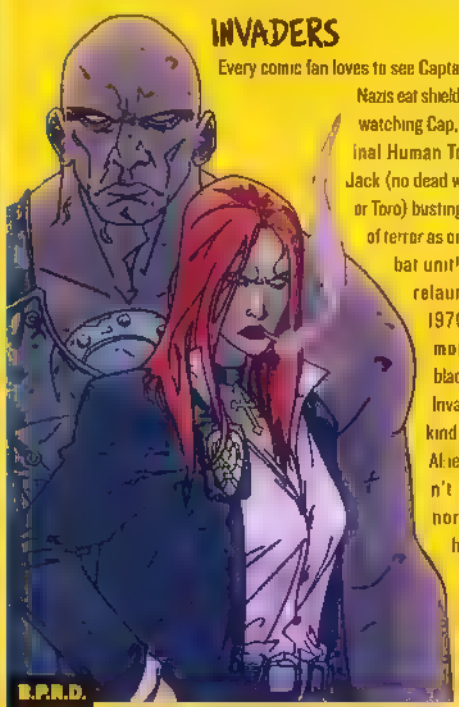
When writers Keith Giffen and J.M. DeMatteis and artist Kevin Maguire rebooted *Justice League* in 1987 as a straight-up humor book, it was a fresh change to what was, at the time, a staid team. Sixteen years later, the same creative team has recaptured the glory as Blue Beetle, Booster Gold and Captain Atom (among others) star in the funniest superhero slice of life since...well, *Justice League*. We need our monthly gut-bust, so howzabout stretching that six-issue mini into an ongoing?

GREEN LANTERN CORPS

The asparagus head and diamond guy GLs are cool and all (okay, maybe not), but here's a lineup that can carry a monthly book: Hal Jordan, John Stewart, Kyle Rayner and Guy Gardner! DC can throw in the Guardians of the Universe for good measure (blue midgets make *any* book better), but we want the premier Green Lanterns protecting not only Earth, but the universe at large! This book would deliver the ultimate in both high-octane action and clashing personalities!

INVADERS

Every comic fan loves to see Captain America make Nazis eat shield, but nothing tops watching Cap, Namor, the original Human Torch and Union Jack (no dead weight like Bucky or Toro) busting up the Axis' ring of terror as one cohesive combat unit! Marvel should relaunch the classic 1970s series with more edge and a black ops twist as the Invaders take on the kind of missions the Allied Forces wouldn't dare send in normal troops to hand. ■ **JESSE THOMPSON**



B.P.R.D.

1. TEEN TITANS (DC)

FOUR RECRUITS JOIN THREE VETERAN TITANS TO LEARN THE ROPES HONE THEIR ABILITIES AND BECOME THE NEXT GENERATION OF DCU ICONS

For most teens, growing pains don't include battles with psychotic mercenaries, would-be terrorists and bloodthirsty alien despots. Unless you're a Teen Titan, that is.

But forget calling them the Junior Justice League; this latest incarnation of the Teen Titans, created by Geoff Johns (*Flash*) and Mike McKone (*Exiles*) may be composed of teen superheroes, but they've been around the block a few times, shedding blood together and learning the hard way that the superhero game can be totally unforgiving. Which is why the Teen Titans formed in the first place.

"Grant Morrison always said, 'Stay at the core of the idea,'" relates Johns. "When you stray too far, you muddy the waters. The Teen Titans are a bunch of kids unsure of what's next and they need help finding out. That's why they band together; to develop their powers and to have each other to lean on."

Reforming the Titans wasn't even on the minds of reluctant new recruits Superboy, Robin, Wonder Girl and Impulse—who join with older members Cyborg, Starfire and Beast Boy—because they're still reeling from the death of Donna Troy (the original Wonder Girl) during the recently wrapped *Young Justice: Graduation Day*. But these young heroes realize that to become the next generation of icons in the DCU, they need even more seasoning, and the place to get that is in the Teen Titans.

In issue #1, the paint hasn't even dried on the new Titans Tower (now in San Francisco) when Robin discovers a terrible secret about Superboy's genetic lineage: not only was Superman's DNA used to create him, but he's also based on genes from Lex Luthor! Things heat up quickly for the Titans from there. In issue #2, the team responds to an emergency on Alcatraz, but during the melee, Impulse finds himself a human calling card for the murderous assassin Deathstroke, who blows off the speedster's kneecap with a shotgun blast as a warning that "kids shouldn't wear costumes." Deathstroke rears his ugly head once more come issue #3, this time with a startling revelation about his true identity that...well, we don't wanna spoil it for you. But suffice to say, Titans fans and new readers alike will be bowled over by the shocker.

"My goal with *Teen Titans* is to do what I do on *JSA*, but do it more streamlined," relates Johns. "They're not grown up yet, so the Titans should be making history, not reliving it. And the Titans will be taking on bigger and better villains: Brother Blood's in the second arc, Lex Luthor's in the third.

"The book will be very character focused, but when the action hits, it hits big!" boasts Johns. "Wait for issue #6, when the JLA shows up!"

Teen Titans created a huge splash when it debuted in July, and the fan response has been overwhelming: Sales totals on issue #1 are up over the 90,000 mark, quite a feat for a property that's been up and down throughout its existence. And if the first arc is any indication, *Teen Titans* could be burning up the charts for some time to come.

"The goal is to get people excited and get them talking," explains Johns. "*Teen Titans* should be one of those books that you can't wait for. I bought 200 copies of #1 out of my own pocket, and when people ask what I do, I hand it to them. So that should show you how happy I am with how it turned out." ■ **AS**

LEFT PAW ON GREEN The Twister games always got out of hand around Titans Tower.

BRIAN AZZARELLO

Thrust into the spotlight with 'Batman' and 'Superman,' the '100 Bullets' scribe refuses to be intimidated

WIZARD You're working on *Batman* starting in October's issue #620 with *100 Bullets* compadre Eduardo Risso. How'd this come about?

AZZARELLO Eduardo and I had signed up to do a fairly big Batman graphic novel. Then I was talking to [artist] Jim Lee and I asked him who was going to follow his *Batman* run. He's like, "I dunno, they're talking to a lot of people and no one really wants to do it." So I'm like, "Eduardo and I are doing this graphic novel, we can probably split it up into six issues...[*he shrugs*] we'd follow you."

Do you feel intimidated following an act like that?

No. Not at all. Y'know, if anything, it's exciting following [Jeph Loeb and Lee]. They did such a great job on that book, and they got people really interested in it. It's up to us to keep the interest.

What's your *Batman* story about?

The story's about guilt. It's about a guilty man fighting crime. I really don't want to say much more than that about it. I'm trying to ignore that Batman wears a costume. [*Laughs*] If I think of it like it's just a trenchcoat, I'm more comfortable with the cape.

Did you get any Batman "moments" out of your system with this story?

There is going to be a *big* Batman moment that no one's seen before.

Anything you can tease?

[*Thinking*] Uh...no. It's just that huge. It's big. It's gonna be a very big Batman moment.

And you'll still be doing *100 Bullets* bimonthly while on *Batman*, right?

Yeah, I want the *100 Bullets* stories to be really accessible for people to pick up. We're leading up to issue #50 [in April], which is pretty heavy into the plot and the big picture and all the players. We're doing these stories for someone who's never picked up the book, but read *Batman*, and are curious to see what we're doing. The big-picture story that we're telling [in *100 Bullets*] is too dense for anybody to grasp really quick.

What was the inspiration for *100 Bullets*?

The inspiration is revenge, pure and simple. Everybody's had murder in their heart at one time or another.

Did someone do you so wrong that you had to get this out of your system?

Yeah, sure. She knows who she is. [*Chuckles*]

You've got *Batman* and *100 Bullets*. In a few months, you'll have *Superman* with Jim Lee. It's the last thing people would expect from a hard-boiled crime writer.

It's crazy, isn't it? I think Superman can be extremely cool if played the right way. I mean, in the "Justice League" cartoon, Superman's a badass. That's what's missing right now. He needs to throw his weight around a bit. It's very strange that the only place Superman's not cool is in the comics. He's cool everywhere else—look at the success of "Smallville." But in comics, readers don't think Superman's cool. So I'm gonna do something about that. [*Laughs*]

"We'll give you a BIG Batman moment that no one's seen before. It's huge."
BRIAN AZZARELLO

Gimme some examples.

[*Pauses*] Just think about his abilities—and I mean, *really* think about them—he tends to get dismissed because he can do anything, and people roll their eyes. Yeah, he can do anything. Now think about that. *He can do anything.*

Any villains you'll tackle? There's that *Man of Steel* mini-series featuring Luthor with artist Lee Bermejo also in 2004.

It's Superman from Luthor's perspective. Luthor views Superman as a threat. Maybe Luthor loves humanity more than Superman does. Well, in his mind. If I can get the readers to understand the way Luthor thinks when we're done with that series, I did my job.

Any other villains in *Superman*?

Jim and I will create some new villains. I mean, Jim's full of so many ideas, and he'd like to leave something permanent behind. I'm all for that.

Who signed up first on *Superman*, you or Jim?

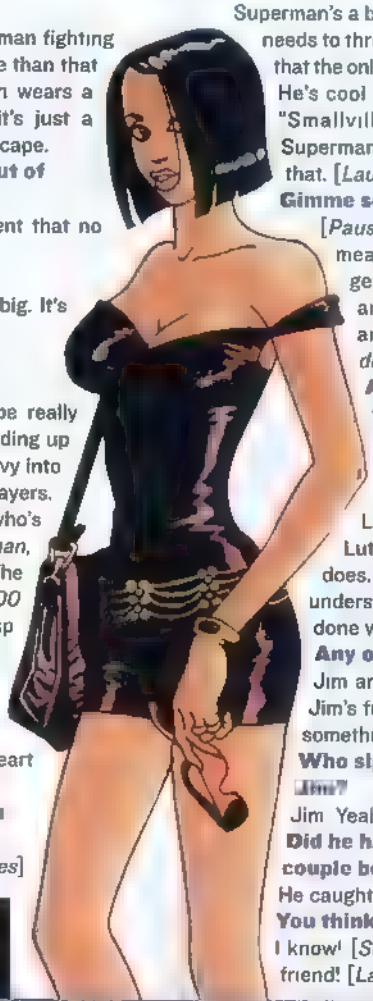
Jim. Yeah.

Did he have to convince you? Buy you a couple beers?

He caught me at a weak moment. [*Laughs*]

You think you pick your friends wisely...

I know! [*Smiles*] And look at the thanks I get. Some friend! [*Laughs*] ■ **BRIAN CUNNINGHAM**



BANG A natural with killer crime tales in *100 Bullets* (the vixen Echo shown here), Azzarello next targets the Dark Knight (opposite).

SGT. ROCK

WIZARD EXCLUSIVE

Kubert and Azzarello uncover the ugly face of World War II in a 144-page graphic novel

BY DAVE MARSHALL

For Sgt. Rock and the men of Easy Company, war never looked this bad.

Teaming legendary artist Joe Kubert with white-hot writer Brian Azzarello, *Sgt. Rock: Between Hell and a Hard Place* unflinchingly confronts the horrors of WWII combat this October in a 144-page hardcover graphic novel from DC/Vertigo.

Set in November 1944, right before the Battle of the Bulge, the story throws Sgt. Rock and the men of Easy Company (including Little Sure Shot, Wildman, Ice Cream Soldier, Bulldozer, and others) amidst the Hurtgen Forest and one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war.

"The loss of life was staggering on both sides," says Azzarello. "We're throwing Sgt. Rock into that. We're throwing him into the meat grinder."

After capturing several German intelligence officers during a covert operation behind enemy lines, Easy Company find themselves embroiled in a nightlong firefight that nearly claims their lives. When the smoke clears, they are shocked to find one prisoner gone and the rest slaughtered. Surrounded by death and destruction, Sgt. Rock begins the unlikely manhunt for the murderer.

Azzarello, known for his gritty realism and dead-on dialogue, assures fans that the graphic novel's mature readers label is about respect for the truth, not shock value. "This is the same Sgt. Rock from 30 years ago," asserts Azzarello. "I wasn't out to Vertigo-ize Sgt. Rock."

Kubert agrees that the most important part of these characters—their humanity—hasn't changed. "None of these guys are superheroes," he explains. "None of these guys are perfect. Yet, because of the situation in which they find themselves, they're all heroes."

Kubert made the men of Easy Company famous with seminal runs on *Our Army at War* and *Sgt. Rock* during the 1960s. For him, returning to these characters wasn't about rehashing old glories, but portraying the soldiers' experiences with the increased honesty afforded by DC's mature readers line.

"When I was doing Sgt. Rock years ago, I tried to inject credibility into the character so that people reading it would feel that this was a real person," recalls Kubert. "What Brian [Azzarello] did, and what I tried to do in this book, was to take it a couple steps further in that direction."

In particular, Azzarello wanted to capture the commitment of these men who took it upon themselves to rid the world of evil. "There were a lot of volunteers in WWII," reminds Azzarello. "These were men that readily accepted that responsibility. They believed they were fighting for freedom, and they were."

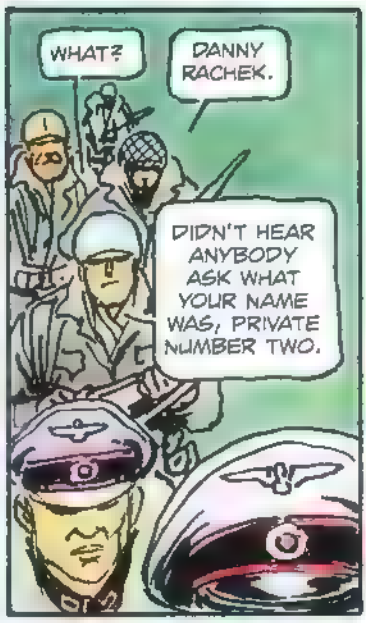
But for Kubert, there was only one way to know if Azzarello got it right. "When I get to illustrate a good story, that's the greatest feeling in the world," says Kubert. "I had that while I was drawing this."

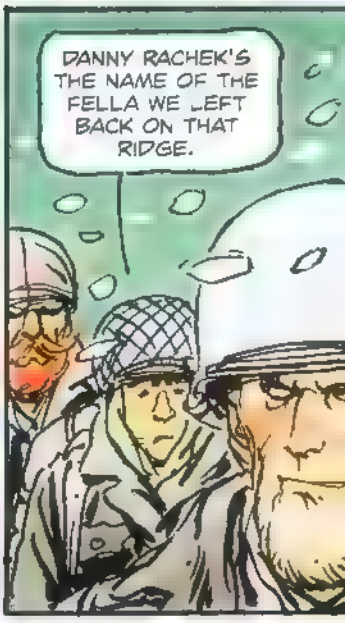
While Kubert may be a biased reviewer, he's the only one that matters to Azzarello. "What am I most proud of? That Joe [Kubert] likes it," says Azzarello. "The rest of you knuckleheads, I don't care what you think."

But us knuckleheads don't have to take his word for it. Check out this exclusive seven-page preview and decide for yourself.

ROCK THROWING *Rock* legend Kubert's only demand to writer Azzarello: keep the content PG-13.

RACHEK.


WHAT?
DANNY RACHEK.
DIDN'T HEAR ANYBODY ASK WHAT YOUR NAME WAS, PRIVATE NUMBER TWO.


DANNY RACHEK'S THE NAME OF THE FELLA WE LEFT BACK ON THAT RIDGE.

WE WENT THROUGH BASIC TOGETHER, ME 'N' HIM, HE WAS FROM MIAMI, FLORIDA. WANTED T'GET A JOB IN A STEEL MILL.

THERE *AIN'T* NO STEEL MILLS IN *MIAMI.*
IS IN CLEVELAND- WHERE *I'M* FROM, AN' I WORKED IN ONE.

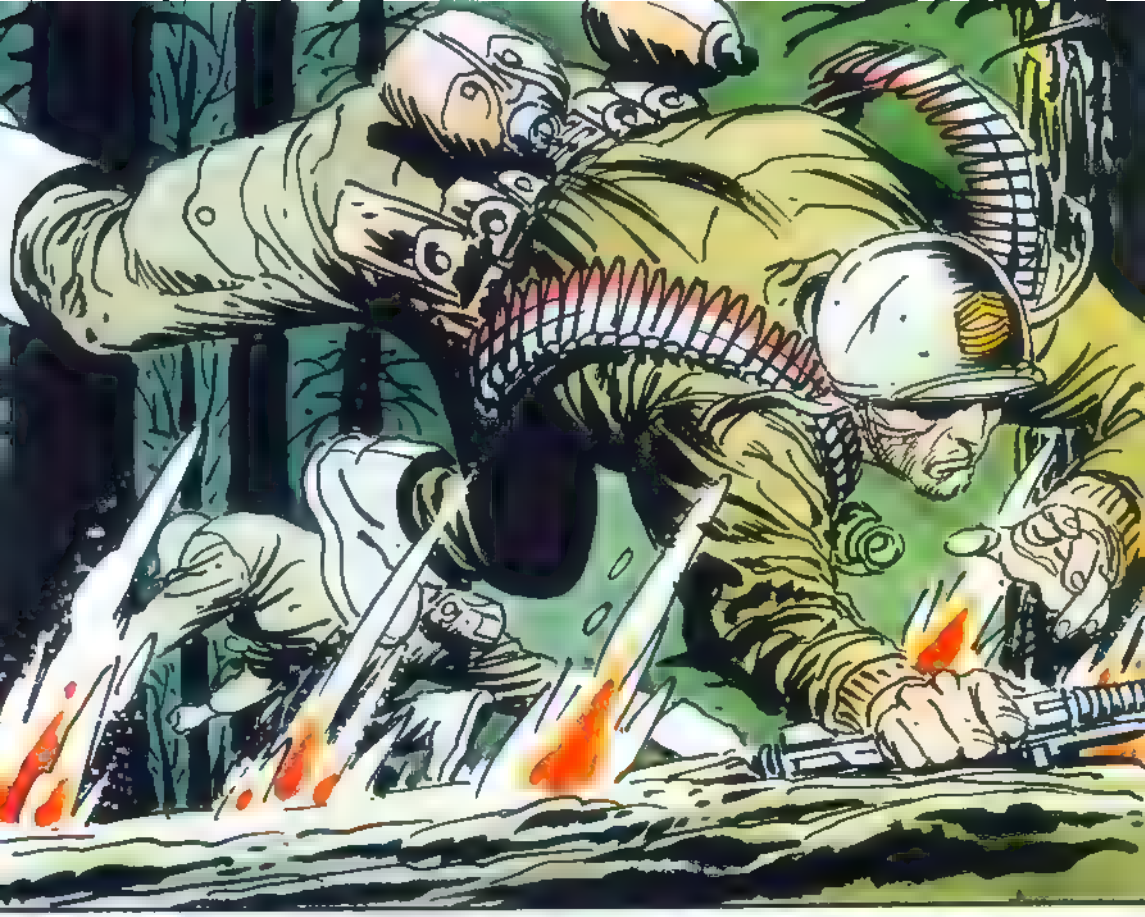
I TOL' DANNY ABOUT IT ONCE. THEN I HADDA LISTEN TO HIM GO ON AN ON EVERY DAMN DAY ABOUT WHAT A REAL SMART JOB T WAS...
...LIKE SWEATIN' IN A FACTORY WAS—
THAT'S ENOUGH, GREASE.
I AIN'T SELLIN' NO SNAKE OIL, SARGE.
IT'S JUST DANNY, HE HAD A NAME, NOT A NUMBER. AN' SO DO I—
--I SAID CHILL THE CHAT, PRIVATE GREASE.
GREASE, SIR?
YOU GOT A BETTER NAME FOR 'IM, COWBOY?
COWBOY! HEY, I LIKE THAT, SARJINT.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IT, TINNY?
TINNY?
WHAT THE HELL ELSE COULD I CALL YOU, COMIN' TO THE RESCUE OF ICE HERE... LIKE RIN TIN TIN?
GOOD BOY!

LOOK... WHO YOU *WERE*, YOU LEFT STATESIDE.
YOU'RE LUCKY; YOU'LL GET TO BE THAT PERSON AGAIN.
IN *EASY*, WHO WE ARE *NOW* IS ALL THAT *MATTERS*.
THIS WAR, YOU'RE GONNA DO SOME THINGS THE PERSON YOU *WERE* MIGHT FIND DAMN HARD TO LIVE WITH.
SO I'M DOING *HIM* A FAVOR, LEAVIN' 'IM HOME. YOU GET IT...
...GREASE?
YES, SIR, I BELIEVE I DO.

COWBOY, ROCK? THAT KID WOULDN'T KNOW HORSE COOKIES FROM HORSE APPLES.
YEAH, WELL... WAS OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD.
TOPS OF THE TREES SAY IT'S GONNA BE DARK SOON, ROCK, WE AIN'T GONNA MAKE IT BACK TO BASE 'FORE IT IS.
I NOT.CED.
WE'LL HIT THE FOXHOLES, BRING THE PR.SONERS IN AT DAWN.
VERY DRAMATIC.
I SAW IT IN A PICTURE ONCE...
...OR WAS THAT "EXECUTE THE PRISONERS AT DAWN"?
WHY WAIT?
I GOT THE FEELING YOU WEREN'T TOO KEEN ON THIS, BULL.
MAYBE I DON'T SEE THE POINT.
MAYBE I DON'T EITHER...
...BUT... THERE'S A CHANCE THOSE S.S. BASTARDS DO.

LOOK, BULL, WE'RE GETT.N' OUR TAILS HANDED TO US IN THESE WOODS. AN' TRUTH BE TOLD...
...I'M FONDA MINE. HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURS?
IT'S NOT MY BEST FEATURE.
SAYS YOU.
GETTIN' FRESH WITH ME, ROCK?
IN YOUR DREAMS, PETUNIA. WHAT I AM GETTIN' AT IS WE ARE GETTIN' NOWHERE. WE CRACKED THE SIEGFRIED LINE -- BARELY.
THE KRAUTS ARE THROWIN' EVERYTHING THEY GOT AT US -- HELL, THEY EVEN GOT THEIR FLAK GUNS POINTED AT THE GROUND.
WE GAIN AN INCH, IT'S SIX FEET DEEP... AN' PILED WITH BODIES A MILE HIGH.

OUR PRISONERS MAY KNOW POSIT ONS. . ANYTHING.., GIVE US AN EDGE WE DON'T—
COVER!



WHAT THE CHRIST?

KRAUTS-- IN OUR FOX-HOLES!

WE'RE CUT OFF!
LIKE IT? PICK UP
SGT. ROCK: BETWEEN HELL
AND A HARD PLACE ON
OCTOBER 15!

BRIAN K. VAUGHAN

The 'Y: The Last Man' scribe tackles Spidey's eight-armed nemesis and pushes his runaway career into overdrive

WIZARD: You're writing a *Dr. Octopus* mini-series [right] in October. Will your take on Doc Ock be based on the movie version of the character?

VAUGHAN: Nope. It's just a good Spider-Man/Doc Ock story that hopefully stays true to the character. I'd like to read the "Spider-Man 2" screenplay, though!

Why Doc Ock?

I like Doc Ock a lot because I always thought he made sense. He seems like a better archnemesis than the Green Goblin. Like most great villains, he's Peter Parker's equal but opposite. He grew up a tortured science nerd, radiation gave him a new life and he's an animal. But I also want to play him a little smarter and a little cooler than he's been played in the past. He's an evil sociopath, but he's got good taste in art and good taste in music.

Do you consider yourself more of a mainstream superhero guy or a Vertigo guy?

I guess I like to think that I'm one of those guys who can hit the balance of both. Like Steven Soderbergh, one of my favorite directors, he can do a movie with heart like "Erin Brockovich," he can do a big budget movie like "Ocean's II" and juggle it with more independent-minded projects like "Traffic." I like superheroes and Vertigo both, and I don't prefer one to the other. I'm a switch-hitter in that respect.

How did your comic book career get off the ground?

It's funny to hear people say that I'm an overnight success, because it's actually been six or seven years! I went to NYU for film and dramatic writing, and there was Joe Kelly [current *JLA* writer], the AV nerd who would wheel televisions into our classroom and stuff. He was in the Stanhattan Project [a Marvel program to find new talent], so I pestered him into letting me into some of the classes. A couple of the editors liked my stuff and threw me bad assignments. It was a slow climb. If you're not writing for an assignment, you're writing a bad *Cloak and Dagger* proposal or a bad *Longshot* proposal. If Marvel didn't throw them away, they'd have an entire room filled with my crappy proposals!

There was a rumor that you were in the running for *Ultimate X-Men* before Brian Michael Bendis signed on. Is an Ultimate stint still in the cards?

It's not like I got offered the book, but there were some early discussions about *Ultimate X-Men*. I've always felt that in order for me to do that book well, I'd want to do exactly what I was doing on *Runaways*—a young group of misfits who are outlawed and on the run, sort of everything that I think the X-Men should be. But I didn't want to be redundant. And I know that's probably the most retarded decision in the history of comics, because I could probably live off of one of [ex-*Ultimate X-Men* writer] Mark Millar's royalty checks for years! [*Laughs*] As much as I love those old characters, I really do think it's important to keep putting out new stuff.

> **"It's going to get dirty for a bit. It'll have lots of nudity and filth, so get ready."**
>
> VAUGHAN ON 'Y: THE LAST MAN'

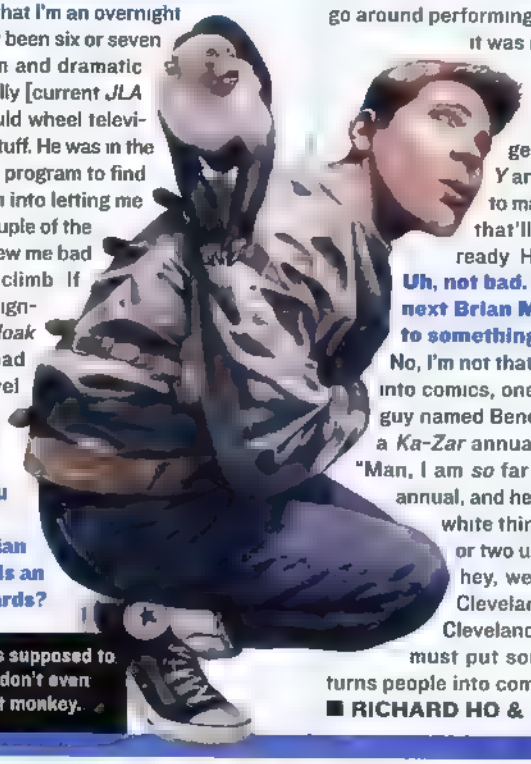
What's up with *Y: The Last Man*?

Paul Chadwick will draw two really different, stand-alone issues called "Tragedy" [October's issue #16] and "Comedy" [#17]. Without dependable electricity, there really aren't movies or TV, so it's about a traveling troupe of actresses who go around performing. But unlike Shakespeare's time, when it was males playing all the roles, the females play all the roles. So we'll see how art has changed in a man's world. And then, after that, the book is going to get very dirty for a little bit. Pia [Guerra, *Y* artist and co-creator] was yelling at me to make it dirtier, so there's a three-issue arc that'll have lots of nudity and filth, so get ready. How's that for a teaser?

Uh, not bad. So, some people say you are the next Brian Michael Bendis. What do you say to something like that?

No, I'm not that good. [*Laughs*] It's funny, before I got into comics, one of my first gigs was to interview this guy named Bendis for *Northern Ohio Lives*. I had sold a *Ka-Zar* annual story at this point, so I'm thinking, "Man, I am *so* far ahead of this guy! I've got a *Ka-Zar* annual, and he's stuck doing these lame-o black-and-white things!" Of course, it would only be a year or two until he was the god of the industry. And hey, we're both bald guys named Brian from Cleveland, and Brian Azzarello is also a native Clevelander who's bald and writes comics. They must put something in the Cuyahoga water that turns people into comic writing freaks.

■ RICHARD HO & DAVE MARSHALL

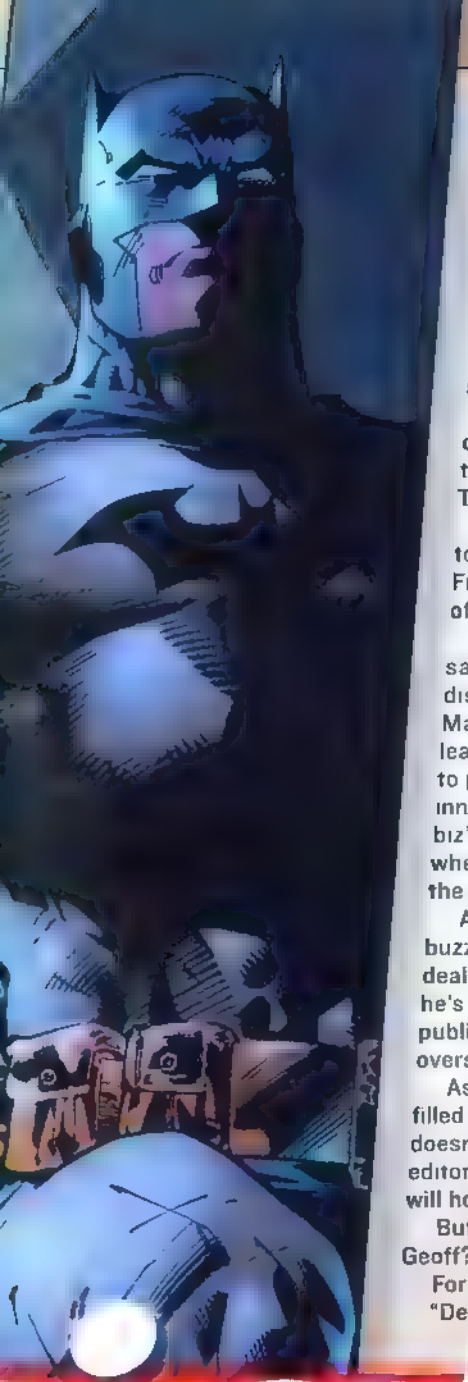


DON'T ASK ME 'Y' Uh, if there's supposed to be "lots of nudity and filth," we don't even wanna know what's up with that monkey.

By Richard Ho

The Negot

10



Sitting with the phone receiver pressed against his ear, Dan DiDio sweats.

DC Comics' Vice President of Editorial is on the horn with Geoff Johns, putting the final touches on a crucial three-year exclusive deal for the superstar scribe. But judging from the snippets of conversation coming from both ends of the line—much of which revolves around how DiDio's Mets have a better shot at making the playoffs than Johns' Tigers in the upcoming baseball season—you'd never guess how critical this negotiation is to DiDio's young comics career. In fact, the easygoing executive couldn't be more relaxed, dressed casually in slacks and a button-down shirt with no tie.

No, DiDio sweats because it's early 2003—smack in the middle of one of the snowiest winters New York City has seen in years—and the heat in the DC offices is cranked up to combat the subzero temperature outside. The warm air is the only thing that makes DiDio uncomfortable.

The 44-year-old stands, preferring the freedom of pacing around his desk to the comfort of his chair. He eventually comes to rest in front of the window. From this vantage point, DiDio has a magnificent view of the hustle and bustle of Broadway below.

Traffic moves along briskly in both directions—but for the longest time, the same couldn't be said about the decades-long race between DC and its distinguished competition. Led by Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas since 2000, Marvel had been chugging along the comic landscape on a one-way street, leaving DC seemingly stalled on the curbside. But DiDio's own Quesada-like rise to power in February 2003 evened the playing field once again. From launching innovative new titles to revamping old favorites to aggressively inking some of the biz's best creators to exclusive deals, DiDio has raised DC's profile to the point where many in the industry have crowned it the most buzzworthy publisher of the year.

And as *Wonder Woman* writer Greg Rucka points out, it's not just about the buzz. "It's about substance," explains the scribe, who recently signed an exclusive deal of his own. "The substantive changes Dan's making in the company and what he's doing for creators is the most important thing to happen at DC since they published *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* [in 1986]. And I don't think I'm overstating it."

As DiDio talks, he spreads a stack of index cards across his desk. The cards are filled with every DC character from the past 10 years that has had some success and doesn't currently have its own book. By the end of the year, DiDio and his team of editors will have filled up every card with potential creators—at which point DiDio will hop back on the phone to start locking teams up.

But right now, he's focused on locking up the deal at hand. "So what do you say, Geoff?" asks DiDio. "Is this something you can get onboard with?"

For Johns, the answer is never really in question.

"Deal."

iator

As DC Comics' new powerbroker, DAN DIDIO deals the publisher back into the spotlight by convincing the best creators in the biz to join his team

LET'S MAKE A DEAL

DiDio has seemingly mastered the art of the blockbuster deal

Much of the current excitement surrounding DC can be traced to the flurry of exclusive deals brokered by DiDio over the past 12 months. His track record reads like a Wizard Fan Award ballot, with names like Johns, Rucka, Judd Winick (*Outsiders*), Jeph Loeb (*Superman/Batman*) and Grant Morrison (*JLA*) locked into the DC roster for the next two to three years. And nearly every one of the dozen or so names he's recruited cites DiDio as the deciding factor in signing on the dotted line.

"He's got this great enthusiasm and a new perspective on things," raves Johns, whose *Teen Titans* #1 has rocked sales charts by going into three printings. "And he's got an idea of where he wants things to go. His best talent is to find the best people possible for a book and give them the freedom to create."

With the industry's cream of the crop at his disposal, DiDio was able to do just that, spearheading a number of exciting high-profile projects to keep the momentum of Loeb and Jim Lee's acclaimed "Hush" run (which was in the works before DiDio arrived at DC) alive. New series like Johns' relaunch of *Teen Titans*, Winick's edgy *Outsiders* and Mark Waid's *Superman: Birthright* all saw the light of day under DiDio's watch.

"*Birthright* was our attempt to find a way not to reboot Superman, but to help reposition him for next year," explains DiDio, referring to the 2004 overhaul of the Superman franchise with all-star creators like Jim Lee, Michael Turner, Brian Azzarello and Rucka, which he also had a hand in. "As for *Teen Titans* and *Outsiders*, that had some people scratching their heads at first. *Titans* and *Young Justice* both were doing okay in sales. But looking at these books, I saw a Superman logo, a Batman logo, a Wonder Woman logo, a Flash logo—hell, these are our big guns! And if they're not performing big, then we must be doing something wrong. So I put the challenge to every editor: Are these books creatively the best we can do? And it forced us to reevaluate."

That sort of thinking led to the birth of two of the hottest team books to come out of DC in a long time—and got the ball rolling for more changes.

But it wasn't always a walk in the park. "At first, I was met with a lot of hesitancy," admits DiDio, recalling that Johns, Morrison, Rucka and Loeb all turned down his offers for exclusive deals the first time around. "Nobody was sure what changes were coming down the road, and they didn't want to lock themselves into any position which they might regret later on down the line. So we had to prove our case and convince them that we were serious about affecting change and being proactive."

"I had some very bad experiences with DC that culminated about four years ago," says Rucka. "There was a reason I was doing a whole lot of work at Marvel. But watching what Dan was doing and talking to him—and I mean *really* talking to him—I decided that I was willing to throw in my lot with Dan DiDio for three years. And that counts for a helluva lot."

And as a fresh-faced newcomer to the industry himself, DiDio's not afraid to gamble on rookie talent like *Losers* writer Andy Diggle and *Hero* scribe Will Pfeifer, banking on their potential to blossom into the next Rucka or Loeb.

For DiDio, it's all part of the master agenda. "We're trying to formulate a long-term plan for the DCU," reveals DiDio. "We're working to tell a big complete story, and I want to make sure the creators who are there at the beginning of our plan are there at the end of it."

HOT STUFF DiDio's push for Kid Flash and *Teen Titans* (above), and *Outsiders* (opposite) shell-shocked sales charts with sold-out debuts.

KNOW IT ALL

Five things you didn't know about DAN DIDIO

1 DiDio is a former *Wizard* freelance writer! He wrote several articles for *Wizard* and sister publication *Entertainment Retailing*, including an article on the launch of Joe Quesada and Jimmy Palmiotti's Event Comics in 1994.

2 Before heading to DC, the last project DiDio worked on at Mainframe Animation was MTV's "Spider-Man" animated series.

3 Palmiotti was DiDio's neighbor in Brooklyn, and the two landed a *Superboy* gig a few months before DiDio started interviewing for his DC job. They did seven issues before it was canceled.

4 Growing up, DiDio bought his comics at the same Brooklyn store as his future boss, DC Publisher Paul Levitz.

5 Favorite DC Comics characters of all-time? The Metal Men.

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Nightwing's gang aren't the only outsiders to make their debut in 2003.

With a background in children's television, the Brooklyn-raised DiDio spent 20 years in Los Angeles between stints with CBS, ABC and Mainframe Animation. Despite being a lifelong comic book fan, DiDio never guessed that his career path would lead him into comics.

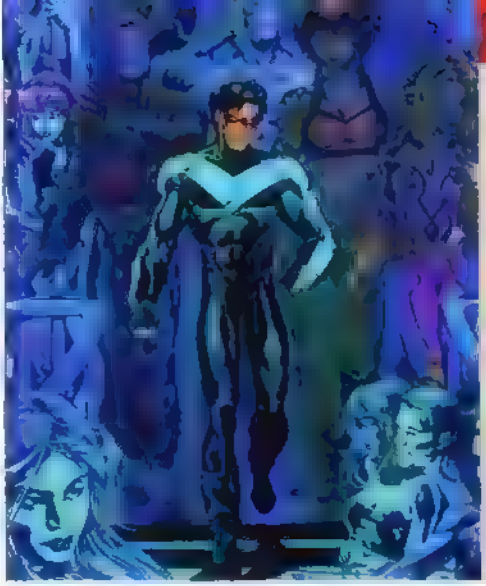
But after years of the Hollywood grind, DiDio sought a change. And all it took was a move back to New York and a chance meeting with Paul Levitz to get him onto the comics track.

DiDio first met the DC President and Publisher years before while developing a "Metal Men" animated series at ABC. One

night late in 2001, DiDio ran into Levitz again at an L.A. restaurant, where he told DiDio about his plans to bring in someone from outside the industry. "Paul explained to me that they have a lot of difficulty bringing in non-comics people because of how quirky the industry is," reveals DiDio. "They wanted somebody who was already familiar with all of that."

It sounded like a perfect fit for DiDio, and the two met over the course of several months to iron out the specifics. "Paul knew that he needed somebody, but he wasn't sure for what," explains DiDio. Ultimately, Levitz created the position of VP Editorial and hired DiDio to fill it in early 2002.

But the rookie editor would wait an entire year before he began overseeing the entire DC Universe in February 2003. "This was my introduction to the world of publishing," points out DiDio, "So I spent my first year learning the business, learning the company, learning the people and the players. Then, when I got moved over to my current role, I was able to get much more aggressive in implementing changes."



HOW I LOCKED UP... JUDD WINICK

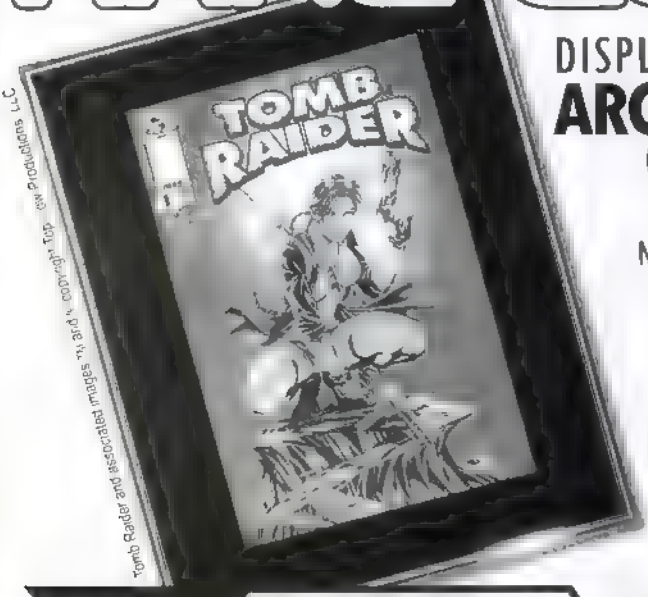
"Judd was the first person I successfully signed, so he was extremely important for me in terms of getting the ball rolling," reveals DiDio. "He was one of a number of writers who were working at DC and Marvel simultaneously. I liked what he was doing at both companies, and I decided that if we could bring him in-house, he could really help push our product forward. So I had a nice long talk with him, and I think I was able to sign him for an exclusive mainly because he was looking to buy a house! [*Laughs*] And steady income is definitely something that helps when you're trying to secure a loan."

STYLE POINTS

The first change DiDio implemented? A completely new atmosphere in the DC offices, courtesy of his infectious enthusiasm and his ability to tune into today's reader.

"He understands what needs to be done to get the modern day reader excited and looking our way," says Group Editor Bob Schreck. "Plus, he tells you what he thinks. There's a very low bullsh-- factor. He gives you his gut feeling, and it's okay if people disagree. It's

HANG COMICS



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very free and open, and his door is open 99 percent of the time."

The door may be open, but odds are DiDio won't be inside. "I rarely sit in my office," laughs DiDio. "I like to go wander around to everybody else's office, which I *think* everybody likes. But if you talk to them privately, they might disagree!"

Whether he's in his office or not, DiDio constantly works with his editors to achieve one goal: Make the books as strong as they can be. "I've always believed that the book should always win, and that everyone's ego—from the editor to the writer to the artist—should be second to the book itself," says Schreck. "And Dan feels the exact same way."

For that reason, DiDio has quickly become a favorite among creators. "With *Flash*, he really helped me out," reveals Johns. "After he first called to introduce himself, we started talking about the fact that there was something missing in the book. So he said, 'I'll check it out and get back.' He went and read 20 issues of what we'd done, and he came back with a bunch of great ideas for a new direction."

GETTING IT RIGHT Waid's retooling of Superman in *Birthright* (above) and Rucka's Wonder Woman reboot (below) all fell under DiDio's eye.

And despite his hectic schedule, DiDio is famous for his accessibility. When *Batman* scribe Brian Azzarello first suggested to Jim Lee that he could restructure the graphic novel he was working on with Eduardo Risso into a six-issue follow-up to "Hush," the response was almost immediate. "I remember Jim saying it was a good idea and that he would get back to me, and about 15 minutes later, Dan DiDio called," laughs Azzarello.

DiDio has also built a reputation as an editor's best friend, employing a management style that encourages creative freedom. "[Senior Group Editor] Mike Carlin is a great editor," says DiDio. "I'll never be as good an editor as him. But I *am* good at managing. I've got by far the best editorial staff in comics in these halls, and I let them do their jobs."

Under that philsophy, DiDio likes to keep his day-to-day involvement in individual books to a minimum. "I like to get in at the beginning and get out," agrees DiDio. "I like to be involved in the process of identifying the creative teams, and I like to be part of the initial concept and development to see where the story's going."

"It's a real collaborative effort," raves Art Director Mark Chiarello. "He gives you the respect you deserve and lets you make your own decisions, which is really refreshing."

But make no mistake: DiDio's not afraid to make the tough decisions, like pulling the plug on the Mike Carey-penned *Firestorm* relaunch before the first issue ever hit the stands. "It just wasn't working, so I decided to pull it," says DiDio. "The thinking was, how often do you relaunch *Firestorm*? You have to get it right in one shot, or you may not get a second."

BEFORE AND AFTER

When DiDio first came onboard, the problems were clear: DC desperately needed new talent, and the company needed to take more creative chances. If those two goals were met, higher sales would surely follow.

Once again, it all started with the creators and the stories they were allowed to tell. "There was always this perception that DC couldn't tell stories, that there's only certain things it could do because it always plays it safe," says DiDio. "So from my standpoint, I wanted to let creators create. Pure and simple. Let's hear your story ideas. Let's talk about what you *can* do, not what you *can't* do, and let's push that as hard as we can."

Next came the tricky issue of sales—a problem that encouraged DiDio to take a radical approach. "When I came in the door, books were selling 20,000 and lower," says DiDio. "So the first thing we did was eliminate all our books that sold less than 20 000 copies. It just doesn't make sense. We're no longer patting ourselves on the back if a book sells 15,000 copies."

But for the quality-conscious DiDio, success is never simply a numbers game. "We still support *Hero* and *Gotham Central* because they present a different taste, flavor and attitude not

HOW I LOCKED UP GREG RUCKA

"Greg was one of those guys who turned me down at first," notes DiDio. "He had a novel-writing career going, he had a creator-owned comics career going, he was working at Marvel and working at DC, and he really didn't want to be pinned down to one house. But once he started seeing a lot of his contemporaries signing exclusives—people he had a lot of respect for—and seeing how they were being treated, I think that's what helped swing the pendulum to our side. And I'd like to think that the birth of his second child helped a little bit too! [*Laughs*]"

necessarily associated with the DC Universe, and I think we need to be as diversified as possible," assures the VP. "When I first started reading DC comics in the early '70s, I was hooked on books like *House of Mystery*, *Strange Adventures* and *Weird Western Tales*—I was going with all these different flavors *before* getting into the superheroes. That's the way I knew DC to be, and I believe that's the way it should be. And with Vertigo, Wildstorm and DC Focus [*see p. 22 for more details*], we're succeeding in getting all those flavors."

SUPERMAN/BATMAN

Nearly a year into his tenure, DiDio would be the first to admit that not everything has been peaches and cream. "Coming to DC, seeing what all the problems were, trying to learn the industry and getting a bit of a beating from Marvel at the same time, I'd be lying if I said that it wasn't frustrating," admits DiDio. "But that's part of the challenge, and what made the job interesting. If it was going to be a cakewalk, it's not what I wanted to do."

You can't argue with the results so far.

THE NEXT BIG THING? DiDio sets his sights on a relauch of Firestorm the Nuclear Man for 2004.

HOW I LOCKED UP... JEPH LOEB

"I first approached Jeph at Wonder Con [in April]," recalls DiDio. "And if I'm not mistaken, Jeph might have been the very first person I ever offered an exclusive to, way back when I first came in. He didn't know me at the time, and I didn't know him. I just knew his work and his reputation, and I thought he would be a good linchpin to start from. But again, because he was having success on both sides of the fence, he didn't see any necessity to place his flag in one camp. Negotiations went on for several months, and eventually I pitched him and [his frequent collaborator, artist] Tim Sale on the idea of doing the *Catwoman* mini-series. And I like to think that helped sweeten the pot!"

MOVING FORWARD

And he ain't done yet.

DiDio points to a series of white boards hanging on the wall of his office. "These boards are clear right now, but they won't be for long," promises the VP. "We're building a schedule that covers the next couple of years, so that we have a solid idea of where we're headed with every one of our projects."

Some items that will show up immediately? "The new *Firestorm* is a priority of mine right now," reveals DiDio. "That should be ready by April or May of next year. We've got Silver Age characters like Vigilante and The Question coming back. I just got a *Manhunter* project approved. We're also looking at Captain Atom. But we're *not* going to put those books on the shelf until we know we have the right creators and an original spin on the characters."

And then there are the projects closer on the horizon. "At the same time, we're trying to relaunch *Superman*, we've got all this exciting stuff happening with *Batman*, we've got three major mini-series coming down the pipe, Vertigo's got stuff happening over here, Wildstorm's got stuff happening over there...how do you not get lost in the shuffle? And that's just in our own house!"

And through it all, Marvel—which still outsells DC—continues to be a formidable opponent. But DiDio wouldn't have it any other way. "I love competition," says the VP. "It's fun, and it's great for everybody. And we still gotta knock them off the top. My goal is to make DC No. 1, and the only way to do that is to beat Marvel when they're at their best. Because if both Marvel and DC are playing at the top of our games, that means the industry's in really good shape. I didn't leave television to come to work in comics to watch it fade away! I really believe there's a long life in comics down the road, and I want us to be a part of it."

So when will DiDio declare final victory? "I won't consider it a win until I see the top five selling books with DC covers!" laughs the exec.

It's not a done deal...but he's working on it.

Staff Writer Richard Ho once tried to negotiate his way out of blowing 100 bucks in a poker game, but wound up losing his money, his dignity and his pants.

THE NEXT BIG THING

'Fantastic Four' represents Marvel's next team-based mega-movie

When it comes to high-octane, big-budget superhero flicks, the wait makes great

After all, as a motion picture property, "X-Men" had more starts and stops than a New York City traffic jam. Likewise, "Spider-Man" dangled in Hollywood oblivion for more than a decade until Sam Raimi signed on.

Next up on the "long-awaited" Marvel properties list is "Fantastic Four," a super-powered potentiality that has Hollywood head honchos, Marvel execs and comic fans around the world all hoping history repeats itself. With its sci-fi themes, family dynamic and an array of super-powers never seen on the big screen, "FF" should—by all indications—be Marvel's next big big-budget, F/X fueled, superhero franchise

The film's release, tentatively scheduled for December 24, 2004, will end one of the longest stays in production purgatory by any comic book property and free FF fans from the hell to which they've been damned since bootlegs of director Roger Corman's "FF" movie began popping up on comic con video tables.

Thankfully, Corman's film was never considered for big-screen release. Bad actors, bad special effects and a bad script combined to make a bad movie, one that probably everyone but Corman hopes will become little more than an amusing footnote once the new "FF" hits theaters

Before any such progress can be made, however, 20th Century Fox must find a director for the film, someone who can bring the same degree of vision and directorial clout that Singer and Raimi brought to "X-Men" and "Spider-Man," respectively. Fox believed it had found such a director in Peyton Reed ("Bring It On"), who'd been attached to the project for almost two years, but he withdrew in July, citing creative differences

With his departure, Reed joins a rather eclectic fraternity of directors who have, at one time or another, been attached to "Fantastic Four," including Raja Gosnell ("Scooby Doo") and Chris Columbus ("Harry Potter").

'Matrix' artist Steve Skroce created what he felt the 'FF' movie should look like.

The latest development on the film, the hiring of screenwriter Mark Frost, will likely bring more of an edge to the project (he wrote for the cult classic "Twin Peaks" TV show) and will possibly play up the team's sci-fi angle

The script, which Frost is reportedly rewriting from scratch, may very well be the nudge that gets the FF's big-screen ball rolling. Michael Broidy of 20th Century Fox says there has been "a lot of interest among big name directors," and a killer script from Frost might convince one of them to commit

"And until they have a script ready to go and a director," Broidy says, addressing the rampant Internet casting rumors, "there will be no casting decisions made."

The online scuttlebutt sites have cast and recast the movie several times over, most recently attaching George Clooney ("Batman & Robin") to the film as Mr. Fantastic and slotting in Renée Zellweger ("Chicago") as the Invisible Woman. Sean Astin ("Lord of the Rings") is now rumored to be eyeballing the project as well

While the director and cast remain in limbo, one thing is certain—the clock on the project is ticking. Fans may have to wait a little bit longer, but as history's shown, a wait might not be such a bad thing. ■ **CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE, WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MIKE COTTON**

DECKED-OUT DOOM "I just wanted to give him more of a dressed-up, modern look," says Skroce. "I was looking at a book on armor, and I just wanted to make him look more Arthurian."

More FF...

ULTIMATE FF debuts in Dec Go to p. 44 for more!

FANTASTIC FOUR #509 kicks off a new arc with new writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and artist Steve McNiven In it, the FF go broke and must get jobs

TRAILERS...

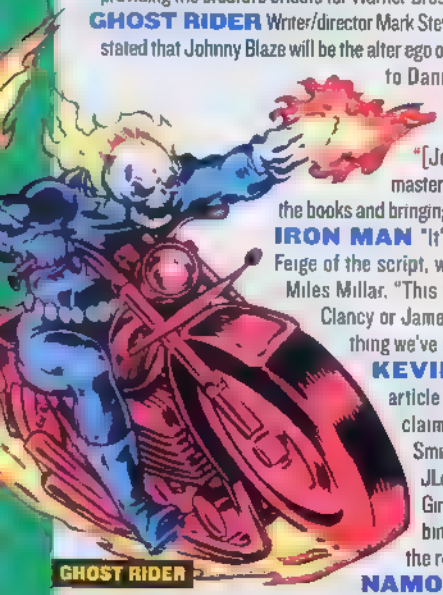
BATMAN ANIMATED "Batman Wired" (featuring a young Batman in a high-tech suit of armor) has reportedly been scrapped by Warner Bros., rumor has it the studio is now developing an animated series simply titled "The Batman."

BLADE ANIMATED CineGroupe has a "Blade" animated series in development with Marvel Entertainment and MTV.

CATWOMAN The latest rumors say Michelle Pfeiffer ("Batman Returns") may cameo as Selina Kyle in this Halle Berry flick. Sharon Stone is also rumored to appear as the main villainess.

CONSTANTINE Special effects guru Stan Winston ("T3") will be providing the creature effects for Warner Bros. *Hellblazer* adaptation.

GHOST RIDER Writer/director Mark Steven Johnson ("Daredevil") stated that Johnny Blaze will be the alter ego of Ghost Rider, as opposed to Danny Ketch. According to Marvel Films Vice President Kevin Feige, "[Johnson's] done another masterful job of taking what's in the books and bringing a life and soul to it."



GHOST RIDER

IRON MAN "It's very promising," says Feige of the script, written by Al Gough and Miles Millar. "This will be more like a Tom Clancy or James Bond movie than anything we've done."

KEVIN SMITH After an article by the *New York Times* claimed that writer/director Smith had significantly cut JLo's screen time in "Jersey Girl" due to the critical drubbing of "Gigli," Smith claims the report was not true.

NAMOR "We just got a script in, and it's pretty epic," says Feige. "We're going to do some minor polishes and then it goes to the studio."

PUNISHER Samantha Mathis ("Broken Arrow") will appear as Amanda Castle, Frank Castle's doomed wife, while Will Patton ("Remember the Titans") stars as Leonard Glass, the right-hand man to mob-boss Howard Saint (John Travolta). Wrestler Kevin Nash is now rumored to be among the cast as well.

SHAZAM Rumor has it that Richard Donner ("Superman: The Movie") is interested in directing the Captain Marvel movie. It's currently being scripted by William Goldman ("Princess Bride").

SUPERMAN Perhaps the troubled "Superman" re-envisioning has finally taken flight—the latest reports indicate that sets are already under construction on the Warner Bros. studio lot!

WONDER WOMAN Laeta Kalogridis, writer/executive producer for The WB!'s "Birds of Prey" series, has reportedly been hired by Warner Bros. to pen a new film script. ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

TRAILER OF THE MONTH

WAKE THE DEAD

It's good to be Steve Niles. Dimension Films has picked up the film rights to the *30 Days of Night* creator's latest IDW series, a retelling of the Frankenstein legend, as well as earning a first crack at his next comic project, *Remains*. Both *30 Days* and Niles' *Criminal Macabre* are in development as well.

LEAGUES ABOVE

'Justice League' amps up Season 3

Think Season Three of "Justice League" will shock and amaze? Just ask Bruce Timm.

"This season is so far and above what we did last season that it's like a completely new show," says the writer/producer. "I'm really jazzed about it."

BIG GUNS The lineup of the animated Justice League

The third season of the Cartoon Network animated series takes off Saturday, Oct. 4 at 10 p.m. with a full hour of more villains, more cameos and a Man of Steel who isn't afraid to kick butt.

After spending last season repelling an alien invasion and slamming scoundrels like Gorilla Grodd, you'd think the Justice League had earned some time off. But DC's seven most powerful heroes can't afford to rest on their laurels with a slew of familiar villains in Season Three. Despero, Amazo and Eclipso all make appearances.

"It's the all 'O' season," jokes Timm.

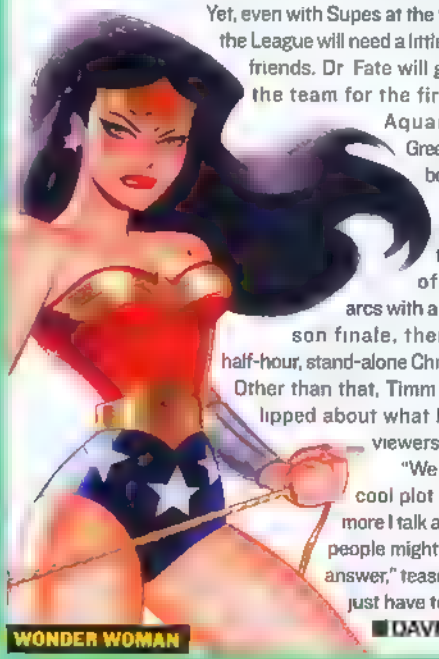
Then again, Lex Luthor, Joker and a new version of the Royal Flush Gang are back and badder than ever. Even the immortal Vandal Savage returns, more committed to his twisted ends.

With the League facing such powerful foes, Superman will take a prominent role as the team's resident powerhouse.

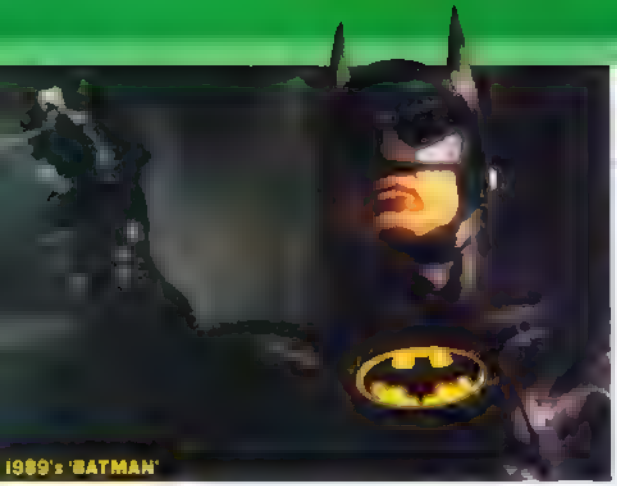
"You always have to come up with a villain or group of villains that is so powerful that Superman can't handle them alone, but without just de-powering him and making him fall down and not get up," explains Timm. "We've been discovering along the way how best to do it, and I think we've finally nailed it."

Yet, even with Supes at the top of his game, the League will need a little help from their friends. Dr. Fate will guest-star with the team for the first time, while Aquaman and the Green Lantern Corps both appear again. While this season will continue the format of two-episode arcs with a three-part season finale, there will be one half-hour, stand-alone Christmas episode. Other than that, Timm remains tight-lipped about what kind of stories viewers can expect.

"We got some really cool plot twists, but the more I talk about it the more people might guess the right answer," teases Timm. "You'll just have to wait and see." ■ DAVE MARSHALL



WONDER WOMAN



1989's "BATMAN"

Q&A: MICHAEL USLAN

Meet Hollywood's 'comic book producer'

Say hello to the biggest comic book fan in Hollywood. Having produced the groundbreaking "Batman" film franchise, as well as the cult classic "Swamp Thing" flicks, Michael Uslan keeps his comic book streak alive by bringing "Catwoman," "Shazam" and another Bat-flick to the big screen.

Check out what he has to say about his future flicks:

WIZARD: How do you decide which projects to tackle?

USLAN: "Batman" [1989] was the single thing that I wanted to do in my life. I wanted a dark and serious version of Batman. It ultimately took 14 years, but it was worth the wait.

But the material I latch onto now is always unique. That's one of the reasons I was drawn to the CrossGen books. It was all different kinds of genres, with great textured characters. And the same thing for the DC properties I'm involved in: "Constantine," "Catwoman," "Shazam." And we're working to set up Will Eisner's *The Spirit*.

Why "Constantine" and "Catwoman"?

"Constantine" is an opportunity to redefine the horror genre—and when I say horror I mean films of the quality of "The Exorcist" or "The Omen"—for a whole new generation. He's kind of the James Dean of the occult world. As for "Catwoman," it has to do with franchises. When you have franchise characters like Batman, which of those supporting characters are worth developing further? Catwoman is the first name on that list.

Which CrossGen property is closest to start?

The first one should be "Way of the Rat." We're in the final stages of scripting. "Route 666" with Bob Zemeckis ["Back to the Future"] is percolating along, as are "Sigil," "Brath" and "Negation."

What's next for you?

One of the projects I'm most excited about is November's 96-page graphic novel that I wrote for DC called *Batman: Detective #27*, with art by Peter Snejbjerg. We place Bruce Wayne in a series of real events with real people, and create a unique kind of "what if?" story. We explore, for example, what might have happened if Bruce Wayne's doorbell had rung while he was in his father's study, and when he closes the windows to go answer it, he sees something smash against the glass and says, "Stupid bird." And from that moment on, everything's different.

When can we expect to see the next "Batman" film?

That I can't comment on, or they'll shoot me. [*Laughs*]

■ RICHARD HO

GREEN LOONTERN CORPS

The Green Lantern Corps never use their power for personal gain. Someone should explain this to Duck Dodgers. In the Oct. 18 episode of Cartoon Network's "Duck Dodgers," Daffy Duck joins the Green Lantern Corps. When Dodgers picks up his laundry, he somehow gets the wrong green suit, and with it a power ring. When the GL Corps are summoned to Oa, Dodgers joins the ranks.

According to "DD" Supervising Producer Spike Brandt, "Dodgers puts the ring on, and he starts doing stuff with it that's maybe not so heroic."

With Dodgers on Oa, fans will be given lots of characters to watch for. "There's like 50-something Green Lanterns in this episode!" exclaims Supervising Producer Tony Cervone. "It was just a total fanboy extravaganza." Fans will catch appearances by GLs Kilowag, Katma Tui, Ch'p and the evil Sinestro! Plus, watch for an extra special cameo at the end of the 30-minute episode by Hal Jordan, voiced by Kevin Smith!

"Kevin's always popping me into stuff to do cameo parts," says "DD" Producer Paul Dini, "so I thought I'd return the favor." ■ HEIDI WARD

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MORE HELL!

New images from the set of Sony's monstrous epic, 'Hellboy'

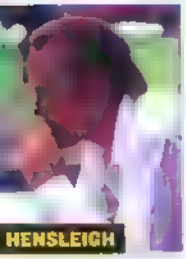
The release date for "Hellboy" has been bumped up to April 2, 2004—which means fans will see Mike Mignola's cult creation spring to cinematic life nearly two months earlier!

But just in case that's still too far off for ya, Sony and Revolution Studios are re-opening the gates of "Hellboy" to give fans another tantalizing glimpse into the film's production!

In this exclusive image for *Wizard*, Ron Perlman as Hellboy gives a ride to a friendly corpse during a snowy cemetery scene (1). The regal-looking Rasputin (Karel Roden, 2) proves that Hellboy's not the only one with a kickass right hand. Meanwhile, the Nazis keep marching along as the masked Kroenen (3) will definitely show up to make life miserable for our heroes. Speaking of heroes, aquatic BPRD agent Abe Sapien (Doug Jones, 4) gears up for a mission, Hellboy decides to go for a rooftop run in the moonlight (5) and the fiery Liz Sherman (Selma Blair, 6) avoids being doused in the rain. ■ **RICHARD HO**

Q&A: JONATHAN HENSLEIGH

The 'Punisher' writer/director talks comics, Thomas Jane and Travolta


HENSLEIGH

WIZARD: When you were working on the script for "The Punisher," were there any particular Punisher stories that you were influenced by?

HENSLEIGH: There were two, and one in particular. The first was *Punisher: Year One.* It was a four-issue set that came out in 1994-1995. It has this really cool cover art and I highly recommend it. I took just pieces of the plot. The plotline was way, way too involved and it would have been "Gone With the Wind"—a four-hour action movie. So there was that, and I was very heavily influenced by Garth Ennis' "Welcome Back Frank" [*Punisher* vol. 4 #1-#12]. That's where I took the tenement apartment, the characters of Spacker Dave, Joan the Mouse, Mr. Bumpo and the Russian. The Russian is appearing in probably the most elaborate and costly of our set pieces.

Since you have incorporated those characters, will you be using some of the comedic elements from that storyline in this film?

Yes. Dead on—same tone. That's what I liked so much about it—it was violent, tense and real, but it had a kind of jaunty, light-on-its-feet, droll tone.

Why did you decide to go with Thomas Jane?

He's always been one of my favorite young actors. He has an everyman look; he's not pretty. He's kind of a burly guy. He's gotten very lean for the role, but he looks tough. And I had seen him play a real man's man in "61*." And I talked to that film's director, Billy Crystal, about Thomas. Billy just went on and on and on about him. I had met Thomas earlier socially and had liked him very much. With all of those components, I just really felt like he was the right guy and the studio and Marvel supported it.

Will there be any costume modifications at all?

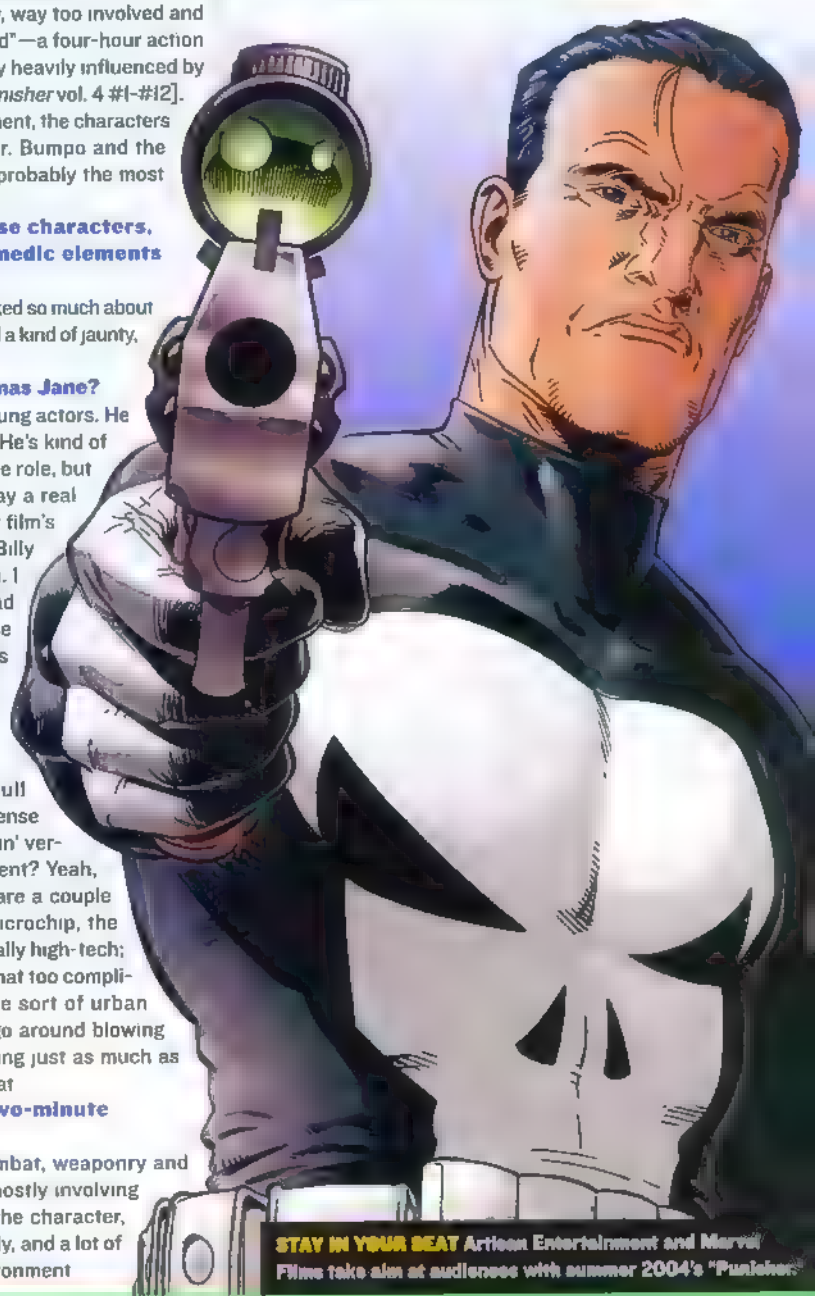
All Punisher fans know that the skull changes. We have in fact taken that license and done what we think is a real bitchin' version of the skull for the movie. Different? Yeah, but it's still right in the family. There are a couple of years where I didn't want to go; Microchip, the battle van, all that stuff where it got really high-tech; we're not going there at all. I deemed that too complicated, too lacking of the spirit of the sort of urban vigilante. The Punisher doesn't just go around blowing people away; he uses guile and cunning just as much as he does weaponry and physical combat.

How do you visualize the first two-minute trailer?

Intense, intense action, physical combat, weaponry and moments of very, very high drama, mostly involving the underlying event which creates the character, which is the slaughter of Castle's family, and a lot of intense shots of him in an urban environment.

How do you see John Travolta and Thomas Jane playing off of each other? In the script, do the characters see parallels in each other?

I think the audience will see parallels, but they don't have a lot of scenes together. It's really the final confrontation. Castle moves through the plot in the second act and the third act engineering things to cause the downfall of Howard Saint. They don't stand face to face, man to man, until the end. ■ **JESSE THOMPSON**



STAY IN YOUR SEAT Artisan Entertainment and Marvel Films take aim at audiences with summer 2004's "Punisher."

PEEK-A-BOO "Arrrr...Hulk must Oxycute ugly pimples."

ANG TIME

'Hulk' DVD stomps the competition with exclusive Xbox game and more

Whether you loved Ang Lee's super-psychodrama or hated it, Universal's "Hulk" DVD plans on smashing the racks come Oct. 28. With mind-blowing special effects, this blockbuster package is jammed with tons of gamma-irridated goodness.

The DVD, directed by Lee ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"), sports an A-list cast including Eric Bana as the emotionally detached Bruce Banner, Jennifer Connelly as Banner's love interest Betty Ross, Sam Elliott as brusque Gen. "Thunderbolt" Ross, Nick Nolte as Banner's psychotic father and—of course—an ILM-generated Hulk.

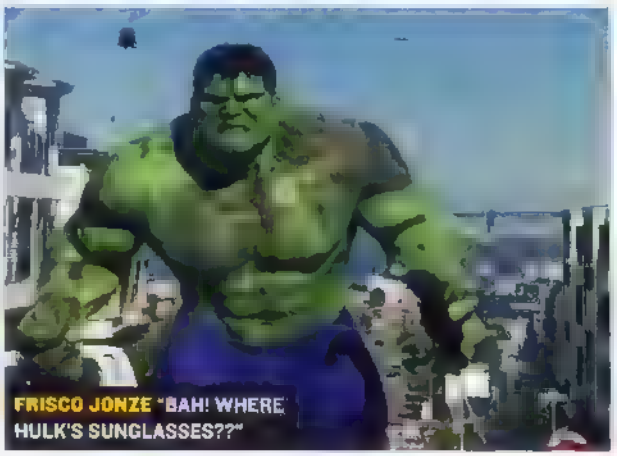
THE HULK
Eric Bana, Jennifer Connelly, Nick Nolte
Rated PG-13, Oct. 28

The flick follows scientist Banner, who's cursed with the ability to transform into a rampaging mountain of carnage every time he loses his temper. He rips through the streets of San Francisco and faces off against a swarm of police officers, the army and a spiced up Absorbing Man-esque character in the film's climax.

To whet your Hulk-sized appetite, here's a list of what you can expect in this gem of a DVD.

XBOX BONANZA—What a deal! Not only do you get a DVD, you get a brand spankin'-new *Hulk* Xbox video game with original levels exclusive only to the DVD.

GLOBETROTTING HULK—This feature spotlights four different illustrations of the Green Goliath, including a European-style drawing, a Japanese anime version, the Marvel version and the final version used in the film. You've never seen so many shades of green.



FRISCO JONZE "BAH! WHERE HULK'S SUNGLASSES??"

EASTER EGGS—This feature will pop up throughout the length of the movie. When you choose it, you'll get a behind-the-scenes tour of what went into the production of that shot.

AND MORE—As if the above weren't enough to satisfy you, the DVD is packed with tons more fun, including "Making Of" featurettes and deleted scenes.

Y'know if Bruce Banner watched this DVD on a regular basis, he'd never lose his temper.

■ DANNY CONSTANTINO

NEO TV "There's, like, hundreds of that Keanu dude. Whoaaaaaaaa..."

RELOAD YOUR DVD

Will 'Matrix 2' rev up DVDs again?

If you thought the first "Matrix" DVD redefined the platform, the sequel will blow your mind

Available Oct. 14—right before "Matrix: Revolutions" hits theaters in November— "Reloaded" reunites rebels Neo (Keanu Reeves), Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) and Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) as they take on the machines that have enslaved the entire human population inside a virtual-reality world

MATRIX: RELOADED

Keanu Reeves

Rated R, Oct. 14

The heroes dodge bullets and perform extraordinary feats with the help of supreme special effects and more baddies than you can shake a cell phone at, including an upgraded Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving), who multiplies himself by the thousands. Add to the mix uber-hotties Jada Pinkett-Smith as Niobe and Monica Bellucci as the seductive Persephone, and you've got one hell of a movie.

And that ain't all, folks. The DVD is loaded with tons of extras to get you wired before viewing the final chapter in the trilogy

PRELOAD—This extra features a behind-the-scenes overview of "Matrix: Reloaded" with on-location footage and interviews with the cast and crew'

THE FREEWAY CHASE—Check out how that mind-blowing car chase scene was captured on film

ENTER THE MATRIX—Discover how the best-selling video game used groundbreaking technology in this bonus feature

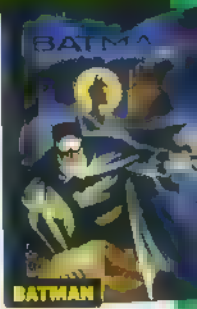
TRINITY

THE MATRIX UNFOLDS—This feature analyzes the "Matrix" phenomenon and its amazing cultural impact

2003 MTV MOVIE AWARDS PARODY—Thought the short film parodying "The Matrix" during the MTV Music Awards was funny? See it in its entirety here

GET ME AN EXIT—Here are a bunch of commercials that were inspired by the "Matrix" movies ■ **DC**

DVD BUZZ...



BATMAN

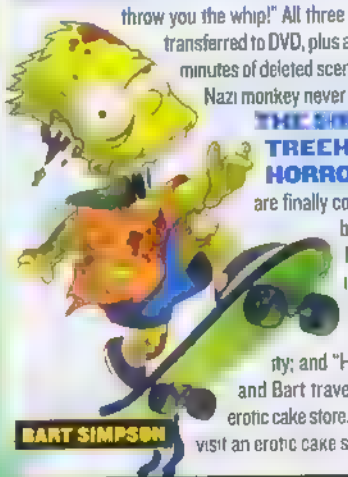
BATMAN: MYSTERY OF THE BATWOMAN Catch the high-swinging action with the release of this brand-new animated Dark Knight adventure! This time around, Bats chases down the tough-as-nails vigilante known as Batwoman before she gets people killed with her extreme ways. (Oct 28)

DEEP SPACE NINE: THE COMPLETE FIFTH SEASON This incredible seven-disc set contains the entire fifth season, which reintroduced "Next Generation" cast member Worf to the series, and spotlights fan-favorite episode "Trials & Tribble-ations," which mixed scenes from the original "Star Trek" series with "DS9" (that, and you see ultra-sexy Dax in that classic, curvy red Trek skirt—mmm...). (Oct. 7)

HERCULES SEASON 2 See manly Kevin Sorbo as the mighty Hercules in this cult TV classic from 1996. These 26 episodes spotlight the debut of warrior princess Xena, who's since got her own show and became a video staple of lonely fanboys worldwide. (Oct. 21)

HOUSE OF 1,000 CORPSES Twisted! That's one word that can sum up this splatterfest. As Rob Zombie's first foray into film this flick hits you with so many memorable murder scenes and bone-chilling horror shots that you may wanna axe the popcorn from your diet. (Now available)

INDIANA JONES TRILOGY "You throw me the DVDs. I'll throw you the whip!" All three classic movies are finally transferred to DVD, plus a fourth disk with over 200 minutes of deleted scenes. Harrison Ford and that Nazi monkey never looked better. (Oct. 21)



BART SIMPSON

THE SIMPSONS TREEHOUSE OF HORROR These Halloween treats are finally collected on DVD! This bad boy has "Treehouse of Horror" Volumes V-VIII including "Time and Punishment" where Homer time travels and alters reality; and "Homer3," that sees Homer and Bart travel to a 3-D world—and an erotic cake store. C'mon, who doesn't wanna visit an erotic cake store? (Now available)

DVD OF THE MONTH

DUO: THE DOCUMENTED ADVENTURES OF THE TERRIFIC TWO

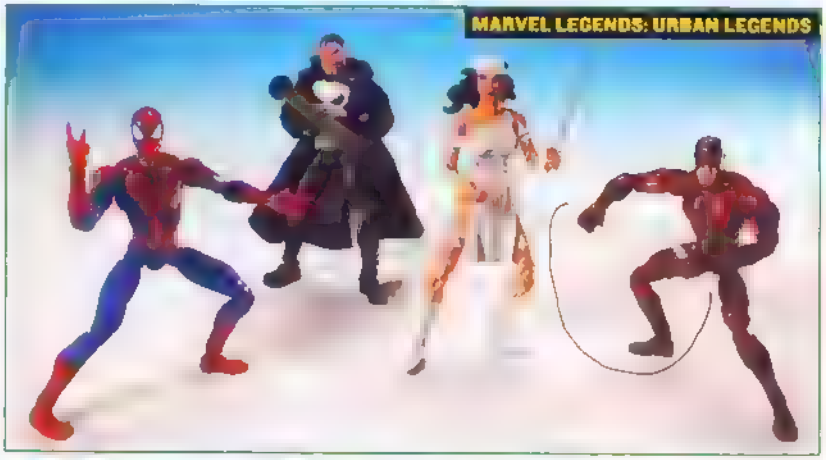
This "mockumentary" follows a day in the life of two buffoonish superheroes, Best Man and Buddy Boy. After their involvement in the Park View Dollar Store debacle (don't ask), the Terrific Two have been under close watch by the press. Enter reporter Crystal Parsons. She goes behind a camera and gets the nitty gritty on the two "heroes," documenting their attempts at fighting crime while living among regular folk in suburban America. She soon learns they are as human as everyone else, enjoying beers, smokes and single women with mask fetishes. (Now available)

LEGEND HAS IT...

Marvel Legends releases X-Men and Urban Legends sets

Toy Biz keeps on rolling with its latest addition to the mega-popular **Marvel Legends** line. Fans have shelled out top dollar for these hyper-articulated, super-detailed action figures and it doesn't look like they'll be locking up their wallets any time soon. With two new sets exploding into stores, Marvel zombies will be drooling all the way to the store. Heck, even non-collectors will find themselves unable to withstand the utter dopeness of these figures. Here's da beef:

The **Urban Legends** of the Marvel Universe lurk in the shadows and fight crime with scare tactics and brute force. Now you can play dirty with bad boys like the Punisher, Daredevil and Spider-Man. Punisher sports a new coat and bazooka while ol' Hornhead and Spidey have whole new paint schemes. The coolest figure in the set has to be the sexy assassin Elektra, decked out in a sleek, all-white variant costume. Note that these special variants are only available in the boxed Urban Legends set. **$30 for set**



The X-Men blow out the doors of the X-Mansion and storm the **Marvel Legends** line with their new box set. This merry mutant collection features heroes, villains and a few unexpected guests. Magneto and Wolverine have new head sculpts, while Gambit and Beast show off their snazzy new threads. But the set's highlighted by none other than that sassy Southern belle, Rogue! Much like the Urban Legends above, you can only get these X-variants and Rogue when you snatch up the entire boxed set, so sweet talk your retailer into saving one for you before you lose more than your paycheck, sugah. **$35 for set**

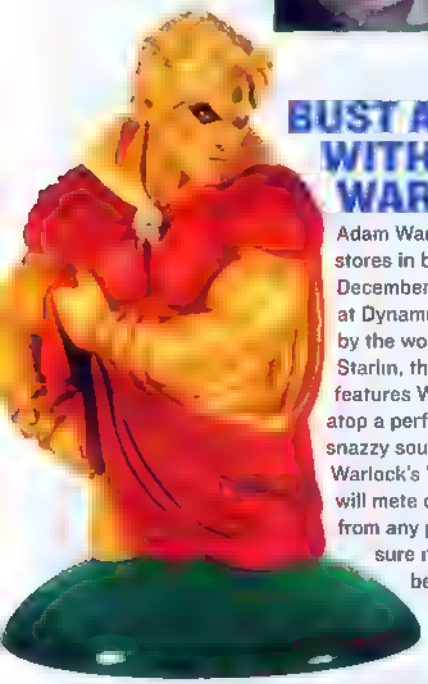
BAT-MITE HE AIN'T

The insanely popular Kubrick craze strikes Gotham in December when Batman and his enemies get minimized courtesy of Medicom Toy Corp for DC Direct. This set of five characters contain exclusive Batman and Robin figures along with Batgirl and classic baddies Mr. Freeze and Scarecrow. All are packaged in a collectible Japanese language window box. These tiny vigilantes are gonna sell quickly and shoot up in value, so grab 'em fast before retailer prices reach Bat-signal levels. **Price determined by retailers**

LEGION OF TWO

The Legion of Super Heroes expand their ranks come February 2004 with new DC Direct action figures of Ferro Lad and Timber Wolf—two of the coolest Legionnaires ever! Both members clock in at 6" and make a great addition to the already growing Legion squad. No battle will be complete without Ferro's iron powers or Timber's Wolf's feral abilities. Sign these dudes up today, or risk an intergalactic tragedy **Price determined by retailers**

BUST A MOVE WITH WARLOCK



Adam Warlock slams into stores in bust form come December thanks to the folks at Dynamic Forces. Inspired by the work of artist Jim Starlin, this 10-inch bust features Warlock perched atop a perfect replica of the snazzy soul gem. Based on Warlock's '70s look, this bust will mete out cosmic justice from any perch Just make sure it's on your shelf before these space-faring collectibles disappear. **$89**

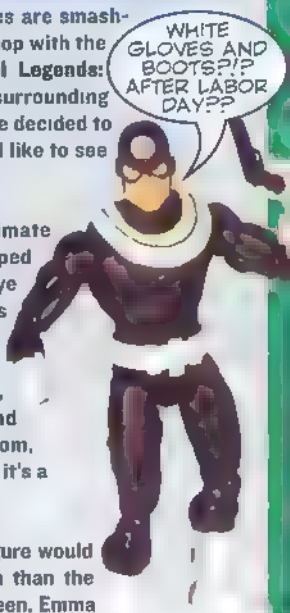
KEY TO THE CASTLE

Unlock the secrets Superman keeps hidden deep in his mysterious hangout with the arctic Key to the Fortress of Solitude Replica from DC Direct. This new Gallery Collectible is built to 1:32 scale and comes with a removable glacial base. Don't try using it on your sister's diary, though. This massive item measures 10" and will be a dead giveaway when she discovers the busted lock. **$195**

LEGENDARY WISHLIST

WE PICK THE MARVEL LEGENDS WE WANNA SEE!

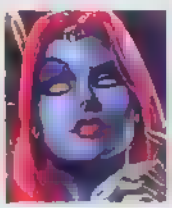
The latest Marvel Legends figures are smashing their way into your local toyshop with the new **Urban Legends** and **Marvel Legends: X-Men** waves. With all the buzz surrounding these ultra-articulated figures, we decided to come up with the characters we'd like to see in the next wave. Here's hoping.



BULLSEYE Daredevil's ultimate nemesis. The badass who capped two of Hornhead's ladies, Bullseye is a constant thorn in the devil's side. It only makes sense he'd be made into a Legends figure. Take a peek at how neat he could look, sporting his original black and white. Just keep him away from, well, anything. If it's in his reach, it's a deadly weapon.

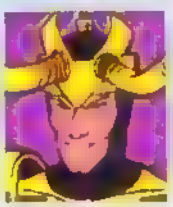
EMMA FROST Yowza! No figure would look finer gracing your collection than the sexy White Queen, Emma Frost. If she isn't getting jiggy with Cyclops on the astral plane in the pages of *New X-Men*, she's doing damage in her own solo book. Either way, this diamond-skinned socialite would be the center of attention on anyone's shelf.

MYSTIQUE The shapeshifting mutant assassin screams "Legends" like no other with her blue skin and bad attitude. Mystique's sexy, super-spy stylin' has catapulted her into the pages of her own solo series. So what if she can't change her shape as a toy? Who'd want her to, when she looks this good?



MR. HYDE This monstrous villain has pestered the Avengers, Daredevil and Captain America for some time and has even gone into battle against the incredible Hulk and Thor! If that doesn't make him deserving of a Marvel Legends figure, what does?

LOKI This god of mischief not only stirs up all kind of trouble for his foster brother Thor, but he does it in style. Sporting one of the coolest original costumes out there, it'd be criminal not to have the sneaky godling wreaking havoc as part of your own Asgardian Legends set.



■ **DANNY CONSTANTINO**

BLOODY GOOD Games like *Silent Hill 3* are dragging frightened fans back to the horror genre.

SCARE TACTICS

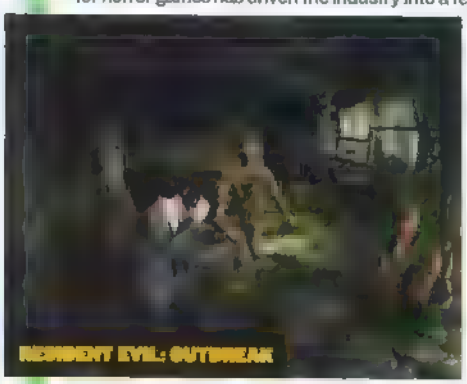
Horror genre pumps adrenaline into the gaming industry

The icy hands of horror have the video game industry by the throat and they're not letting go

But things weren't always that frightening for gamers. With a mere 16 to 32 bit graphics to work with, classic horror games like *Splatterhouse* for TurboGraphix 16 were anything but scary And plot? Let's just say side-scrolling adventure doesn't really make for the most involved gaming experience

That was then.

Today, it's a little bit harder to get any sleep if you're a horror game fanatic. The games seem a little too real. The increased demand for horror games has driven the industry into a feeding frenzy. Thanks to stunning 3-D graphics, improved stereo sound and more cinematic motion, games like *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* have leapt off the screen and into gamers' living rooms.



RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK

"Just like the popularity of scary movies, horror games give people an exciting, adrenaline-pumping, heart-thumping experience," explained Wilson Cheng, product manager for Konami. "They touch upon topics that may be disturbing or even horrific but nonetheless are great stories for games."

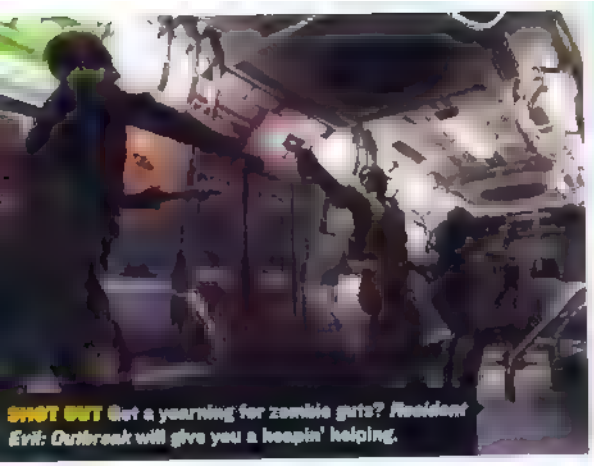
SILENT HILL 3

If there are six million ways to die, then there's at least as many ways to kill. Zombies and other ghouls tend to stick to evisceration or the ever-popular brain eating, but the heroes who fight against them have to be a little more creative to survive. When a hail of bullets doesn't cut it, a simple snapshot can do the trick.

In Tecmo's *Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly*, twin sisters Mayu and Mio use a magical camera to stop the ghosts haunting their village, which means they have to get up close and personal with the freakish phantoms. Playing supernatural paparazzi means gamers don't have to get too much blood on their hands, but keeping their underwear clean through this thriller is another matter.

The catalyst for the horror wave was Capcom's *Resident Evil*. The breakout hit spilled into stores and created a manic base of fans hungry for more blood, guts and guns.

"*Resident Evil* was the major influence in horror games because it was the first to bring this genre to mass market and sell million of units worldwide," explained Arne Cual-



SHOT OUT Get a yearning for zombie guts? *Resident Evil: Outbreak* will give you a hoopin' helping.

Pedroso, public relations specialist for Capcom. "Never before had any video game evoked such fear. *Resident Evil* is the franchise that literally defined the 'survival horror' genre and found its way into America by becoming a word in the dictionary."

If painting the town red with zombie brains is to your liking, Capcom's *Resident Evil: Outbreak* or Midway's *The Suffering* are just what the witch doctor ordered. *Outbreak*, the newest installment in the Resident Evil series, brings the action online and allows gamers to fight the roaming undead of Raccoon City with a little help from their friends. Up to four players can choose from eight civilian characters to battle the bloodthirsty hellions. Players can either risk their lives to prevent a teammate from becoming zombie fodder or flee the scene in terror like a girly man.

The Suffering takes the survival horror genre to a new level. The game drops players in the middle of a maximum-security prison infested with creatures from beyond the grave. Torque, the anti-hero star of this monster bash, slashes it out with undead prisoners and a variety of other grisly foes designed by acclaimed monster-maker Stan Winston ("Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines")! Plus, there's a little bit of evil in Torque himself. When his rage builds up, he transforms into a hideously deformed beast and makes those walking cadavers wish they'd stayed six feet under.

Konami's *Silent Hill 3* brings hack and slash to new levels of dismemberment. In the game, a young girl named Heather wakes from a nightmare to a disturbing reality. She's trapped in a mall that's crawling with swarms of hyper-detailed evil creatures instead of shoppers. Escaping will take all of her wits and plenty of ammo. "We were able to create amazingly realistic facial expressions for characters as well as environments that seem almost alive," gushed Cheng. "There are parts in the game where the walls throb with blood!"

So does this mean horror is here to stay?

"Like horror movies," noted Cual-Pedroso, "Horror video games will always be popular." Cheng agreed, "As long as people like to be scared, the horror genre will continue to thrive."

■ TODD CASEY

DIDJA KNOW?

[redacted] never spoken in the "Resident Evil" films

VIDEO GAME RUMBLINGS

PSX The PS3 may be a long way off, but gamers can get their PlayStation fix in 2004 with Sony's newly-unveiled PSX. The new system serves as a multi-purpose device that combines PS2 gaming with DVD and digital video recording capabilities. The unit also functions as a set-top box with a broadcast satellite tuner, and boasts a 120 GB internal hard drive! Just another reason never to leave your living room.

SNAKE PLISSKEN Namco has won the rights to create a series of video games based on the popular star of "Escape from New York" and "Escape from LA." Players will be able to fight their way across the bleak, futuristic landscape of the movies while listening to authentic Snake dialogue, courtesy of actor Kurt Russell. The first installment of the action-adventure franchise is slated to debut in time for the 2005 holiday season.

SNAKE PLISSKEN

CALL OF DUTY Activision's intense first-person war thriller received a dose of Hollywood star power when Jason Statham ("Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels") and Giovanni Ribisi ("Saving Private Ryan") signed on to voice key characters in the story. The story follows a squad of Allied soldiers fighting for their lives in the German battlefields of World War II. The game will be available this fall for the PC.

GAMES WE'RE ITCHING TO PLAY

- **Castlevania: Lament of Innocence (Konami)**

The beloved horror franchise returns as the story of the first Belmont to take on Dracula is finally told! Players navigate stunningly detailed 3-D environments as Leon Belmont, using his trusty whip to battle hordes of horrific monsters. (PS2, October)

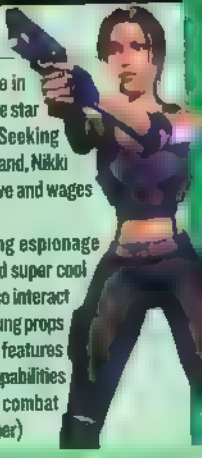
- **Backyard Wrestling (Eidos)**

Hilarious characters, destructible environments and ridiculous moves make for the ultimate outside-the-ring wrestling experience. (PS2, Xbox, October)

CASTLEVANIA

GAME OF THE MONTH

ROGUE OPS (Kemco)



Move over, Lara Croft! There's a new virtual babe in town! Nikki Conners proves that looks can kill as the star of Kemco's new spy action thriller *Rogue Ops*. Seeking vengeance for the deaths of her daughter and husband, Nikki trains to become the ultimate government operative and wages war against the terrorist organization Omega 19.

Players undergo eight chapters of grueling espionage adventure, using an arsenal of lethal weapons and super cool spy gadgets like X-ray vision goggles. Nikki can also interact with the environment, blending into shadows and using props to distract enemies. And that's not all—the game features plenty more stealth capabilities, from innovative capabilities like pick-pocketing to a kickass stealth combo combat system. (Xbox, October; PS2, GameCube, November)

COURTNEY LOVE GOES MANGA

Grunge rocker, TOKYOPOP join forces to create 'Princess Ai'

She's appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, played the wife of porn king Larry Flynt and modeled some questionable fashions, but Courtney Love's never had the one thing she's always wanted—her own manga.

Thanks to TOKYOPOP, that's about to change.

Enter *Princess Ai*, a manga series featuring the fantasy adventures of an outspoken young girl who disguises herself as a nightclub performer and is—you guessed it—based on rock and movie star Courtney Love.

"Courtney initiated the project," explained TOKYOPOP Senior Editor Mark Paniccia. "She had actually lived in Japan and became very interested in the culture and comics there. Courtney thought the appealing format and visual storytelling of manga would be the perfect venue for the adventures of an alter ego of herself."

Storming shelves in 2004, the manga boasts character designs by Ai Yazawa (*Paradise Kiss*) with art and story by D.J. Milky (*Karma Klub*). In order to capture the fiery attitude of the rock diva, both Yazawa and Milky have been working with Love and scouring her lyrics to build the manga's story and dialogue.

"Courtney's deeply involved in the story. The idea is to create some of the emotional momentum of her songs."

TOKYOPOP'S MARK PANICCIA

WHOLE LOTTA LOVE *Princess Ai*'s creative team sorted through stacks of Love's lyrics as research for her manga.

"Courtney's deeply involved in the creation, characters and story," said Paniccia. "There are thematic ties to her music. The idea is to create some of the emotional momentum that her songs bring to her fans."

The sole heir to a kingdom in a land "far, far away," Princess Ai flees to Earth when revolutionaries overthrow the monarchy. Blaming the Royal Kingdom for problems with the working class, the rebels hunt Princess Ai despite her previous efforts to answer their grievances.

Relentlessly pursued by those who would profit from her destruction, Princess Ai hides in plain sight, becoming a singer in the fast-paced nightlife of Kabushiki-cho. An immediate success, her outrageous performances and controversial lyrics draw considerable attention, much like her real world counterpart.

"What you'll experience as a reader are facets of Courtney's personality and life," said Paniccia. "Some stuff will be very symbolic, some things will be very obvious."

In fact, followers of Love's work in music and film are in for a real treasure hunt while reading the manga.

"While Courtney's not from an unknown land like Princess Ai is, there's meaning to places and events that the character experiences," said Paniccia. "I think that makes it fun for a reader—you actually have things hidden in layers of the story and characters."

For Love, *Princess Ai* is just the beginning. With her new album "America's Sweetheart" hitting stores in October and a concert tour scheduled for the fall, Love plans to incorporate *Princess Ai* imagery into both her live performances and music videos. After that, merchandise and even an anime may soon follow.

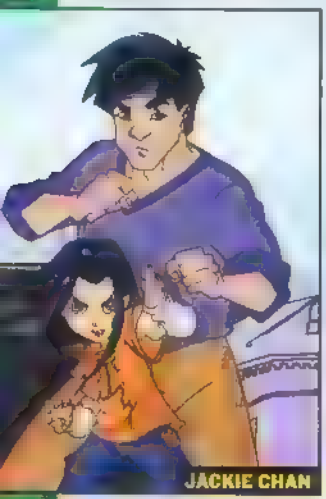
While most people have come to expect the unexpected from Love, TOKYOPOP hopes that her pioneering move from music to manga might lead the way for other musicians. "This is the first project of its kind," said Paniccia. "But TOKYOPOP definitely wants to do more music projects in the future."

■ **DAVE MARSHALL**

ANIME BUZZBOX

VOLTRON Rejoice, robot animal lovers! One of the most popular anime in America has a fourth season in production. According to World Events Products, the new season of "Voltron" will discard the CGI effects of season three for a more classic look. Expect the tentatively titled "Voltron Interactive" to appear sometime next year.

GO FISH DreamWorks recently created a new subdivision dedicated to distributing foreign and independent films. Named Go Fish after the DreamWorks logo, the division has acquired worldwide distribution rights (excluding Japan) for "Millennium Actress" and "Innocence: Ghost in the Shell 2."



JACKIE CHAN

JACKIE CHAN Manga fans are about to figure out what filmgoers in Hong Kong and the U.S. have known for years: Jackie Chan is the man! Thanks to TOKYOPOP, a manga based on the über-popular "Jackie Chan Adventures" cartoon series will be hitting shelves this November. Each volume will feature full-color images taken directly from the show.

SAILOR MOON ADV Films broke some big news at Otakon this summer, announcing that the second "Sailor Moon" box set is currently in production. Hardcore Moonies can expect the same level of completeness and extra goodies that earned the first box set heaps of praise.

SAILOR MOON

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS: MANGA!

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS

Get ready to see G-Force the way the team was meant to be seen. Top Cow pays respect to *Battle of the Planets*' Japanese roots this October with *Battle of the Planets: Manga*, a three-part mini-series drawn in full-blown manga black and white. So be sure to join the G-Force as they descend on an amusement park to kick some evil mech butt. The mini-series features art by Edwin David and a story by David Wohl.

NEON GENESIS SENTINEL-ION?

Marvel's mutant hunters go mecha

For high-tech, mutant-hunting killing machines, the Sentinels looked about as menacing as C-3PO in purple boots—until *Mystique* artist Jorge Lucas brought his radical redesign to the table.

In issue #4 of her solo series, Mystique uncovers a factory where new, more sophisticated Sentinels are being constructed. It was up to Lucas to give the mechanical giants a more menacing look. The striking resemblance his design bears to the giant mech from "Neon Genesis Evangelion" was no accident.

"I love 'NGE' and I'm a fan of the Evangelion saga," gushed the Buenos Aires-based artist, "It's an homage to the series."

Anime and manga are loaded with heavy metal, but the ominous robots of "Evangelion" have just the design Lucas was looking for.

"I'm an anime fan and I've seen lots of series and movies over the years," he explained, but the frightful robots from "Neon Genesis" piqued his interest most. "The mech design is something evil and apocalyptic."

And what could be more evil and apocalyptic than an army of soulless robots ready to wipe an entire race off the face of the earth? Not much. ■ **TODD CASEY**

LOOK FAMILIAR? The Sentinels from *Mystique* #4 (left) could be easily mistaken for one of the mech from 'Neon Genesis Evangelion' (right).

HOTIMPORTS

MANGA:

AZUMANGA DAIOH: THE MANGA (ADV Manga) Tomoe, Osaka, Chiyo, Sakaki and Kiyomi are six girls in high school, but their antics are far from ordinary. Written in a series of four-panel comics by Kiyohiko Azuma, their everyday adventures are touching, hilarious, absurd and real. $9.95

ASTRO BOY VOL. 19 (Dark Horse Comics) 50 years after his debut, Osamu Tezuka's *Asto Boy* still has what it takes to endear, enchant and excite countless fans! $9.95

ANIME:

WITCH HUNTER ROBIN VOL. 1 LIMITED EDITION (Bandai Entertainment) "X-Files" meets "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" in this series, where the covert STNJ is given the unenviable task of stopping witches and sorcerers who abuse their supernatural abilities. This limited edition comes with the original CD soundtrack! $59.98

INITIAL D VOL. 2 (TOKYOPOP) The Akina Speed Stars race against the Akagi Red Suns, but Tak surprises everyone when he shows up to race for the Speed Stars in Bunta's place! For the first time, Tak takes joy in his racing skills in three great episodes. $19.99

HEAT GUY J VOL. 2: VAMPIRE'S AMBITION (Pioneer Entertainment) From the creators of "Escaflowne" comes this futuristic cop series featuring thrilling action and foil-enhanced packaging. Claire, the head of a crime syndicate, will stop at nothing to destroy J and Daisuke! $29.98

STUFF:

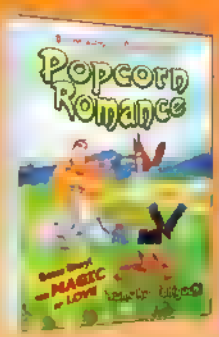
GUYMELEF (Toycom) Robots are cool. Dragons are cooler. Robots with swords that transform into dragons are the coolest. Now you can have one yourself—as this huge 8" toy, featuring 12 points of articulation, hits stores. Capturing the feel and look of the awe-inspiring Guymelef, it also transforms into dragon mode, with a whopping 14-inch wingspan! $59.99

INCENTIVE OF THE MONTH

ANIME TEST DRIVE (US Manga Corps)

Got a longing for good, affordable anime DVDs? Now you can get more anime for your buck and expand your personal collection. Leave it to the good people at US Manga Corps to bring us the first wave in what will hopefully become a series of economically-priced DVDs. With great titles like the "Ping Pong Club," "Legend of Himiko," "Maze" and the "Patlabor Mobile Police," we'll be watching anime until next month's releases come out! $7.99 each

GREAT MANGA! GREAT PRICE! only $9.99 each



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Two great shoujo romances from TOMOKO TANIGUCHI!

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Book One
By KIA ASAMIYA, the artist of *Uncanny X-Men* and *Batman: Child of Dreams*.

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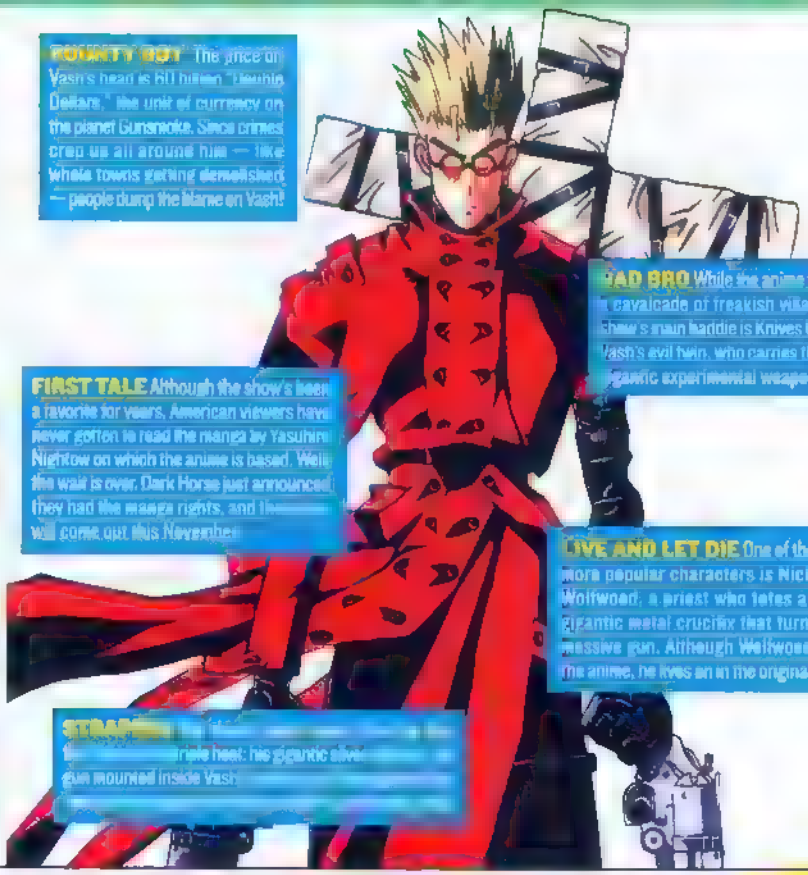
ANIME 101:

TRIGUN

Listen up, varmint! The dusty planet Gunsmoke ain't no place for a yellow-bellied fanboy. To survive, you'll need guts and brains. A cybernetic gun implanted in your arm wouldn't hurt either. "Trigun," Adult Swim's hottest action series, has been blowing anime fans away for the past two years. Now, it seems the rest of America has caught up with Vash the Stampede and his bullet-dodging antics. Pioneer enjoyed instant success when they first released the series on DVD back in 2001. Vash became an icon among anime fans overnight. One step into any anime convention and you'll see a veritable ocean of red coats and blond hair. Vash's popularity soars above most other anime heroes, rivaling his own pet cat. So, what's so cool about The 60 Billion Double Dollar Man? Find out here.

■ ZAC BERTSCHY



BOUNTY BOY The price on Vash's head is 60 billion "Double Dollars," the unit of currency on the planet Gunsmoke. Since crimes crop up all around him — like whole towns getting demolished — people dump the blame on Vash!

BAD BRO While the anime features a cavalcade of freakish villains, the show's main baddie is Knives Millions Vash's evil twin, who carries the same gigantic experimental weapon

FIRST TALE Although the show's been a favorite for years, American viewers have never gotten to read the manga by Yasuhiro Nightow on which the anime is based. Well, the wait is over. Dark Horse just announced they had the manga rights, and the will come out this November

LIVE AND LET DIE One of the show's more popular characters is Nicholas D. Wolfwood, a priest who totes around a gigantic metal crucifix that turns into a massive gun. Although Wolfwood d the anime, he lives on in the original manga!

STRA male host: his gigantic alter gun mounted inside Vash

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DARK DAYS

The creators behind IDW's '30 Days of Night' bring horror to new heights—this time in a town near you!

THE DIRT After vampires destroy your home, consume your friends and kill your husband, you don't seek out a therapist; you do what *30 Days of Night* survivor Stella Olemaun does—you go looking for payback.

DOYA LIKE? If you enjoy getting wigged out by the creepy, early episodes of "The X-Files" or if you can't help but watch the "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" episode "Hush" over and over again (even though the pale, bony guys really, really freak you out), *Dark Days* is the book for you.

DIDJA KNOW? Crosses have no effect on the vampires of the *30 Days* universe. Creator Steve Niles says their resistance isn't so much a rewriting of vampire lore as it is a byproduct of life in modern times. "I think there are a lot more vampires who just weren't raised Catholic," he laughs. "People were very superstitious when that [myth about crosses warding off bloodsuckers] started, including vampires. In modern times, vampires skip church—they just don't believe in it."

WRITER: STEVE NILES
ARTIST: BEN TEMPLESMITH
PUBLISHER: IDEA + DESIGN WORKS

Revenge tastes bloody good—just ask Stella Olemaun. Stella, the Barrow, Alaska deputy and reluctant heroine of last year's hit *30 Days of Night*, has returned as an avenging angel obsessed with dusting the undead in the IDW mini-series *Dark Days*.

Building off the phenomenal success of its predecessor, *Dark Days* established itself as a smash hit right out of the gate (issue #1 of the six-issue mini reached No. 30 on the Diamond sales charts and propelled IDW into the mainstream consciousness), cementing writer Steve Niles' status as the reigning king of horror comics.

"In *30 Days of Night*, people either became vampires, they became dead or they survived," Niles explains. "*Dark Days* is about Stella, a survivor, and about what she's become."

It was the horrendous events of *30 Days* that toughened Stella up, Sarah Connor-style. The grisly tale, in which a horde of vampires spend a month terrorizing the sun-starved town of Barrow, became *the* comic (the sold-out first issue consistently sold for $50 on eBay), *the* intellectual property (a Hollywood bidding war over the rights to *30 Days* netted Niles a rumored $1 million) and *the* fanboy-makes-good success story (Niles' story had been repeatedly rejected by movie studios until finding a home at IDW) of 2002.

In short, with *30 Days* Niles and artist Ben Templesmith did what many in comics aspire to do—produce a comic that transcends comics. With *Dark Days*, they've done it again—and they've done it without resorting to the same old tricks.

"This isn't a sequel in the classic sense," Niles offers. "I didn't want to do vampires invading Alaska again or vampires going to Finland—I really wanted to come out with something that tells about how the survivors got through what happened."

Dark Days opens more than a year after the slaughter in Barrow, with Stella kicking off a promotional jaunt for her book (also titled *30 Days of Night*), in which she reveals the blood-soaked details of the town's tragic fate and—more controversially—names the creatures responsible. Her goal is twofold—to call attention to the existence of vampires and to destroy the bloodsuckers wherever and whenever possible.

The fight, from the perspective of both Stella and the vampires, has become more personal this time around.

"*Dark Days* is a lot more emotionally driven and, in an odd way, it gives the vampires a fair shake," Niles says. "In *30 Days of Night*, you read that they have clashes among themselves and there are different ideas—even among vampires—of what vampires should be. In *Dark Days* you see a lot more of that, that there are whole different sects—a whole different world—out there.

"The horror moments are still there," he continues, "but there are a lot more emotion and action-driven moments, too."

Those emotional moments aren't limited to the human cast members, either. Dane, a vampire Stella encounters in issue #3, is capable not only of displaying sincere emotions but also

BUFF VAMPIRE SLAYER Stella Olemaun won't let a pesky wedgie stop her from taking out bloodsuckers.

THESE ARE LIGHTS USED BY MANY PEOPLE IN ALASKA AND OTHER LOCALES WHERE THEY ARE DEPRIVED OF SUNLIGHT FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD OF TIME.
THESE LIGHTS SUPPLY THE VITAMIN D THAT HUMANS NEED... BUT THEY HURT VAMPIRES.
WOW... VAMPIRES. I KNOW YOU'RE HERE. SHOW YOURSELF OR WE TURN THE LIGHTS ON.

NO FUN IN THE SUN Something tells us these chumps aren't named Chocula.

of remembering who and what he was before he was "turned."

"To me, what happens with vampirism is that you're literally taken over by evil," Niles says. "What I played with in *30 Days* was Eben [sheriff of Barrow and Stella's husband] fighting that off long enough to save his town. If a vampire dedicated his life to doing that, a little bit over a long period of time, he might be able to overcome and be compassionate, to not just see people as hunks of meat."

Stella, it seems, doesn't care.

"She's thinking about obliterating vampires from the face of the earth," Niles explains. "She's lashing out in hatred. Part of her frustration is that if she could get the FBI or the LAPD or any law enforcement agency to believe there are vampires, they could just do sweeps during the day and probably annihilate the vampire population in no time.

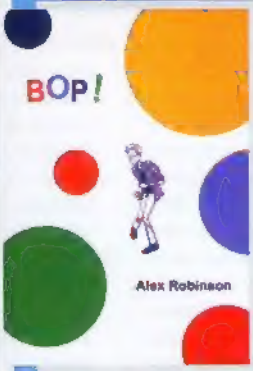
"Vampires are that vulnerable," he says. "But nobody believes, so they thrive."

THE LAST WORD Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith have staked their claim on the horror movie adrenaline rush—that cardiac-thumping, pulse-pounding, dig-your-fingernails-into-the-thigh-of-the-person-sitting-next-to-you surge of primal paranoia—once again in the pages of a comic. From the moment you open *Dark Days*, you'll think twice about going out alone at night. ■ CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE

WANNA PICK UP THIS SERIES?

Call 1 888 COMIC-BOOK to find your nearest comic shop, or visit www.idwpublishing.com. Do you know about a cool series that deserves the "Secret Stash" treatment? Write to us at "Secret Stash," c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY. 10920, or e-mail us at secretstash@wizarduniverse.com.

INDYBUZZ



BOP! [MORE BOX OFFICE POISON] With more outtakes than "The Beatles Anthology," Alex Robinson's *BOP!* gives readers some of the best *Box Office Poison* stories previously available only as mini-comics or in various anthologies.

If you've ever lusted after your ex, got picked on in school or despised your job, this smorgasbord of whimsical and tender stories is sure to hit home. Published by Top Shelf Productions, the trade paperback (out in October) collects every Robinson story that wasn't in 2001's massive 608-page *Box Office Poison* collection.

These aren't just reheated leftovers, either; *BOP!* is the perfect appetizer for those unfamiliar with Robinson's heartfelt genius and a real treat for *Box Office Poison* aficionados. For more info, visit **www.topshelfcomix.com**. $9.95.

CRACKURZ Warning: *Crackurz Super Special* #1 may cause you to look at fowl in a whole new light. This slammin' 48-page collection of raucous roosters proves there's nothing funnier than birds with a bad attitude. Blame creators James Patrick and D.J. Coffman of Canadia Press for all your hilarity-induced injuries. Check it out at **www.crackurz.com**. $3.95.

TINY GIANTS Nate Powell remembers the surreal beauty and pain of growing up in suburbia. With *Tiny Giants*, Soft Skull Press collects 200 pages of Powell's penetrating tales of youth. Relive the wonder of late-night pranks, first girlfriends and hometowns after high school without actually having to go through it all again. **www.softskull.com**, $15.

UNION STATION When the Tommy gun fire ceased, nearly a dozen bodies lay strewn amidst the shattered glass. In 1933, the Feds and organized crime were at war, and no one was innocent. Find out who pulled the trigger in *Union Station*, a true crime graphic novel in the vein of "The Untouchables" from Oni Press, written by Andy Parks and drawn by Eduardo Barreto. **www.onipress.com**, $11.95.

WATCHING DAYS BECOME YEARS Like a haiku, only longer and with pictures, Jeff LeVine's comics strike to the core of solitary urban life. Eavesdrop on conversations in a café, walk along crowed city streets and taste the bittersweet freedom of being alone in *Watching Days Become Years*, a collection of LeVine's brief, Gen-X strips published by Sparkplug Comic Books. **www.sparkplugcomicbooks.com**, $4.50.
■ DAVE MARSHALL

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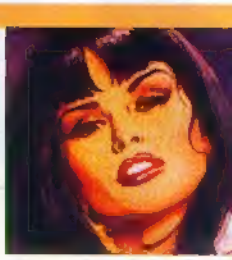
13 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT VAMPIRELLA



1. SHE'S A MODEL VAMPIRE. You may recognize Harris Comics' new Vampirella model Kitana Baker as one of the "Cat Fight Girls" from the Miller Lite commercials, but do you know which girl—"Less filling" or "Tastes great"—she was? If you picked "Less filling," you're right. But you still don't win a date with Kitana, pal.

2. BLOODY WRONG. Legendary fantasy artist Frank Frazetta and comic artist Trina Robbins created Vampirella's costume, though Frazetta's often given sole credit.

3. GRANT MORRISON, Kurt Busiek and Mark Millar have all penned Vampirella stories. In fact, Morrison and Millar are credited with having launched Vampirella's "new direction" in the late 1990s.

4. A 'VAMPIRELLA' MOVIE was released in 1996 starring Talisa Soto as the intergalactic vampire with The Who's Roger Daltrey. The film's tagline: "Thirsty for justice, she'll settle for blood." If you're lucky, you may catch it on Showtime late at night. Otherwise, a video copy was seen in Lubbock, Tex.

5. CALL HER A 'NET NYMPHO.' That's what Kitana Baker played on the Playboy Channel's sex-talk program, "Nightcalls 411." On the live call-in show, she read sexual e-mails from the viewers aloud—naked.

6. KITANA'S NOT the first Vampirella model with ties to the *Playboy* mansion. That honor belongs to the very first photographed Vampi, *Playboy* Playmate Barbara Leigh, who first graced the cover of a Warren magazine in 1978. Leigh's generally hailed as "the original Vampirella."

7. SHE CAN GO TO HELL. Vampirella hails from Drakulon, a domain of vampires (it was once an alien planet, but now it's a level of Hell) where the rivers run red with blood. It wasn't until she came to Earth (where she's supposed to eradicate the evil vampires spawned by her mother Lilith) that she needed to drink the blood of a human to survive.

8. KITANA APPEARED ON BILLBOARDS for Miller Lite prior to "Cat Fight," but she still had to audition for the part. She and her sparring partner, Tonya Ballinger, went on to do several similar ads, including one where they had a pillow fight with Pam Anderson.

9. A RED BODY THONG and silken black tresses aren't Vampirella's only identifying features. She's had a bat-shaped birthmark above her right breast. Over the years, the mark's appeared and disappeared and has, on occasion, been on different parts of her body; specifically, on her left breast and left hip.

10. SHE KNOWS HER ROCK STARS—Kitana's appeared in video shoots for Sugar Ray, Offspring, George Michael, Brian McKnight and Drag Pipe.

11. WANNA TAKE VAMPIRELLA out for a bite? (We mean dinner, of course.) Feel free to have something with garlic. A new breed of bloodsucker, she's immune to all their traditional weaknesses (garlic, sunlight, crosses, etc.). But she's not immune to bad breath, bro.

12. VAMPIRELLA'S NUMBERS ...we could give you plenty (she debuted in 1969, her first magazine ran through 1983), but the only ones you're probably concerned with are 36-26-36—Kitana Baker's measurements.

13. WANNA SEE MORE OF KITANA? Vist her website (www.kitanabaker.com), but it'll cost you—$9.95 a month or $79.95 per year.

■ CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE & RICKEY PURDIN

TOTAL VAMP Kitana Baker is one of three *Playboy* models to wear that slinky Vampirella outfit. (Barbara Leigh and Sascha Knopf are the others.)